

11 Was there race before modernity? The example of 'Jewish' blood in late medieval Spain

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What is known as the history of concepts is really a history either of our knowledge of concepts or of the meaning of words.

Gottlob Frege, *Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik*, vii.

Less than a lifetime ago many scholars agreed that racial concepts offered reasonable explanations for the differences they perceived between certain human populations. That consensus extended, not only to such "colour" distinctions as those between "white" European and "black" sub-Saharan African, but also to less chromatic classifications such as "Indo-European" and "Semite." It extended backward in time, as well. In the nineteenth century, for example, the most eminent historians did not hesitate to describe medieval and early-modern conflicts between Christians and Jews (or Muslims) as racial. Today the situation has so reversed itself so that no scholar of any stripe or period can strip the word "race" of its scare-quotes without inviting polemic.

It is not difficult to find the turning point in the fate of race as theory. It came at mid-twentieth century, with the German National Socialists' implementation of an explicitly racial ideology that culminated in the extermination of millions of members of those races deemed most dangerous or degenerate. Opponents of fascism often pointed critically to the brutality of Nazi racial policies, even if they made relatively little effort to help the victims of those policies, and this critique in turn strengthened the arguments of those who sought to challenge the authority of racial ideologies in the countries and colonies of the eventual Allies. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s in the United States, for example, African-American journalists drew frequent comparisons between the treatment of Jews in Germany and blacks at home. In those same decades, social scientists like Ruth Benedict and Ashley Montague took up Franz Boas's invitation to demonstrate the arbitrariness of any definition of "race." In *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race* (1942),

Montague made the point through the then timely example of the Jews. For centuries, he claimed, the persecution of Jews

was always done on social, cultural, or religious grounds ... [W]hatever was held against them was never attributed to clearly defined biological reasons. The 'racial' interpretation is a modern 'discovery.' That is the important point to grasp. The objection to any people on 'racial' or biological grounds is virtually a purely modern innovation.

The goal of arguments like Montague's was to demolish the scientific grounds upon which racial regimes justified their discriminations between human populations, thereby unmasking those discriminations as the contingent product of the workings of power in modernity. So great was the success of such arguments that by 1950 race was discredited as a mode of discourse in the biological and social sciences, if not in more regional or popular dialects. For evidence of the impact of this discursive shift, we need look no further than the United Nations' post-war declarations on human rights, or the deliberations of the United States' Supreme Court about the constitutionality of segregation.¹

The dismantling of racism's claims to provide a natural explanation for the existence of cultural, economic, and social difference, or for the persistence of such difference through time, was one of the most important achievements of the mid-twentieth-century social sciences. Since that time, those sciences have been struggling with mixed success to find new terms and theories with which to describe and explain the persistence of group identity and group difference across time and space.² Historians too are struggling with the consequences of the dismantling of race, but theirs is a slightly different problem, for their task is not only that of criticizing the ontological status of key words and concepts such as race, but also that of understanding the concepts and categories that their

¹ Ashley Montague, *Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race*, revised edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974[1942]), pp. 21–22. At p. 56 he quotes Boas: “[W]e talk all the time glibly of races and nobody can give us a definite answer to the question what constitutes a race” (quoted from Franz Boas, “History and Science in Anthropology: A Reply”, *American Anthropologist* 38 (1936), 140.) Thurgood Marshall's successful arguments before the Supreme Court in the case of *Sweatt vs. Texas* (1950) provide a good example of some of the legal consequences of the de-legitimization of racial theory in academic circles. Marshall called on Robert Redfield, chair of the anthropology department at the University of Chicago, to explain to the justices that “there is no understandable factual basis for classification by race.” See Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), p. 264. My thanks to Jane Dailey for these references.

² See, *inter alia*, Michael Banton, *Racial Theories*, second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. ix. On the struggle for a vocabulary to apply to the case of Jews and Judaism specifically, see Gavin Langmuir, ‘Prolegomena to any present analysis of hostility against Jews’, *Social Science Information = Information sur les sciences sociales* 15 (1976), 689–727, here 691.

historical subjects used to make sensible (at least to them) claims about the formation and reproduction of group identities in their own societies.

These two goals are not always compatible. When, for example, scholars make use of the word race in their analyses of nineteenth- and twentieth-century United States history, as they so often do, they are deploying what they know to be a “myth” incapable of definition. But if they were to follow the injunctions of the more radical among them to erase such fictions from their vocabulary, they would lose purchase on the language of their subjects. (Besides, such a logic would require us to expunge many other words from our analyses, among them “God.”)³ It is for this reason, among others, that modernists, insofar as they are describing the thought-world of their subjects rather than their own, continue to write about “race” and “racism” with relatively little controversy. But the further we move toward the pre-modern, the more controversial such usage becomes. Why should we apply words denoting concepts that we ourselves believe have no value as explanations of difference, to societies whose protagonists were not only ignorant (except, as we shall see, in Romance-speaking lands) of the word “race” itself, but also untutored by the scientists (Lamarck, Mendel, Darwin, Huxley...) who would give that word teeth? On both sides of the chronological divide between the modern and the pre-modern (wherever it may lie), there is today a remarkable consensus that the earlier vocabularies of difference are innocent of race.

Like every consensus, this one has costs as well as benefits. But before exploring those, it is worth pointing out the more or less mutual disinterest upon which the consensus is based. Among advocates of pre-modern innocence, the dismissal of race too often relies on the most cursory engagement with the complex history of the modern racial concepts whose relevance is at issue.⁴ Some take refuge in lexicography, arguing (for example) that because the word *Rasse* did not enter German 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. Others embrace narrow definitional strategies which succeed, not in solving the problem but in rendering it uninteresting. It is not

³ The more radical among them: for Barbara Fields’s argument against the explanatory value of race in American history, see Barbara Fields, “Ideology and Race in American History”, in Joseph M. Kousser and James McPherson (eds), *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 143–177.

⁴ Rainer Walz, “Der vormoderne Antisemitismus: Religiöser Fanatismus oder Rassenwahn?”, *Historische Zeitschrift* 260 (1995), 719–748, offers an excellent review of some of the definitions of race proposed in the debate, as well as some new suggestions.

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.⁵ Such definitions cannot tell us much about the pre-modern, since they fail to make sense even of modern racial ideologies against which they define themselves, ideologies which are themselves not only tremendously diverse, but also change a great deal over time.

Perhaps the most widespread and intuitively persuasive argument against the relevance of race for the pre-modern period is the common view that medieval (for example) classifications of peoples were not sufficiently biological to qualify as racism, no matter how much they might smack of natural history. Robert Bartlett put this consensus particularly well: “while the language of race [in medieval sources] – gens, natio, ‘blood,’ ‘stock,’ etc. – is *biological*, its medieval reality was almost entirely *cultural*.”⁶ Although it is not absolutely clear what “reality” of language means here – perhaps the reality of the differences described by the language? –, what is clear is that the procedure of establishing a difference between the terms of a distinction (biological) and the reality of that distinction (cultural) is meant to relieve the Middle Ages of the charge of racism.

We need not pronounce judgment on the charge in order to wonder if this defense is adequate. 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. Modern population genetics has of course discovered some real differences between, say, sub-Saharan African populations and Swedish ones, or between Jewish and non-Jewish

⁵ A criticism I would make also of Walz. This tendency is manifest even in the otherwise excellent article “Rasse”, in Otto Brunner *et al.* (eds), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexicon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, 8 vols. (Stuttgart: E. Klett, 1984), vol. V, pp. 135–178. On the other hand, neither is it very helpful to describe as racial every ideology that assigns to lineage a role in the production of identity, as many proponents of pre-modern “racism” do. Thus for Arlette Jouanna, race is an idea “according to which the qualities that classify an individual within society are hereditarily transmittable through blood”. Arlette Jouanna, *L’idée de Race en France au XVIème Siècle et au Début du XVIIème Siècle (1498–1614)*, 3 vols. (Lille/Paris: Université Lille III, 1976), vol. I, p. 1.

⁶ Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization, and Cultural Change, 950–1350* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 197 [emphasis added]. Bartlett’s insights on the topic are very helpfully expanded in his “Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Identity”, *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001), 39–56, which, however, largely avoids both Jews and the Romance languages.

populations (as any student of breast cancer or Tay-Sachs disease knows).⁷ But these real biological differences have no obvious or natural relationship to the cultural work they are asked to do in systems of racial discrimination, systems which are products of culture, not of nature. If this lack of congruence does not suffice to make modern racist ideologies less “racial,” then it cannot suffice to excuse pre-modern discriminations from the charge.⁸

We can generalize this objection: rather than engage in a systematic comparison of the discursive power of natural histories deployed in specific pre-modern and modern arguments about the reproduction of group difference, we pre-modernists too often rely on the questionable axiom that modern racial theories depend upon evolutionary biology and genetics, in order to leap to the demonstrably false conclusion that there exists a truly biological modern racism against which earlier forms of discrimination can be measured and judged innocent.⁹ But the certainties of modernists about the origins of race are equally partial, and equally questionable. In one of a series of lectures at the Collège de France in 1976, Michel Foucault (to pick a prominent example) insisted that racism

⁷ The possibility of identifying genetic markers whose relative frequency varies markedly between specific populations has long been known. See, for one example of such variation, Surinder S. Papiha, “Genetic variation and Disease Susceptibility in NCWP [New Commonwealth with Pakistani] Groups in Britain”, *New Community* 13 (1987), 373–383, on the genetic causes of the varying susceptibility to specific diseases in Britain of Anglo-Saxon populations and populations of immigrants from the Asian subcontinent.

⁸ For similar reasons, arguments like that of David Romano, who insists that “els antropòlegs seriosos ... estableixen clarament que no hi ha races,” and that therefore there was complete racial equality of Christians and Jews in medieval Catalonia, seem to me beside the point. On that argument, there can have been no racial inequality in 1930s Germany, either. See David Romano, “Característiques dels jueus en relació amb els cristians en els estats hispànics”, in *jornades d’història dels jueus a Catalunya* (Girona: Ajuntament de Girona, 1987), pp. 9–27, here p. 15f.

⁹ I call the axiom questionable on two grounds. First, the late eighteenth century efflorescence of racial theory (e.g., in Immanuel Kant’s 1775 “Von den verschiedenen Rassen der Menschen” in *Gesammelte Schriften, Akademie-Ausgabe* [Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1902], vol. II, pp. 429–443, and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *De generis humani varietate nativa* [On the Natural Varieties of Mankind] [Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1795]) depended much more on Montesquieu’s updated version of climate theory than on genetic arguments. (For an early example of the impact of such theories on writing about Jews see Johann David Michaelis’s critique of Christian Wilhelm Dohm, *Ueber die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden*, 2 vols. [Berlin and Stettin: Friedrich Nicolai, 1781–3], vol. II, pp. 51, 63.) Second, even after the widespread dissemination of Darwinian evolution, many of the examples of hybridity and its dangers most favored by nineteenth- and twentieth-century racist writers (like Alfred Schultz, *Race or Mongrel: A Brief History of the Rise and Fall of the Ancient Races of Earth* [Boston: L. C. Page & company, 1908]) were drawn from an agricultural domain of animal breeding that was already well known in the ancient and medieval worlds. I know of no comparative study on this topic, and will myself no more than gesture toward one below.

was a uniquely modern phenomenon, the product of a European struggle for sovereignty that did not occur before the seventeenth century. According to Foucault, medieval sovereignty had been organic and corporatist. It was of course hierarchical and therefore often conflictual, but that 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?”¹⁰

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 (as classes, for example), 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 reflection of the symbolic order that articulated power in terms of organic unity, in modernity history became a battlefield, an accounting of losses and victories in the eternal war of the races.

Even if we were to grant (as many would not¹¹) that the struggle for sovereignty within Europe was the key conflict in the emergence of race, we could easily object that Foucault’s arguments for the modern origins of race depend upon a falsely organic view of the Middle Ages. Have not R.I. Moore, Dominique Iogna-Prat, Tomaž Mastnak, and many other medievalists shown us the dependence of medieval arguments about sovereignty on the identification of Jewish, Muslim, or heretical threats to Christian society, and on claims to defend Christian society against those threats? It is relatively easy to demonstrate the importance of such religious “enmities” to the formation of Western European notions of a Christendom threatened from without and within by impurity and

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *Il faut défendre la société: Cours au Collège de France, 1976* (Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 1997), p. 65.

¹¹ Although my conclusion here is not quantitative, my sense is that scholars of the emergence of race and racism are generally more interested in the external challenges of European exploration, expansion, and colonialism than in internal European conflicts over sovereignty.

pollution.¹² Why should these enmities not be considered a sufficient stimulus to the symbolic logic Foucault associated with the origins of race? Clearly Foucault's audience shared some of these doubts, for he began his next lecture (of February 4) by addressing them. "During the last week or two, people have sent me a number of objections, both oral and written," 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 these questions. It is unlikely that he was sympathetic, given that history was for him a scythe, to be swung against the giant stalks of genealogical fantasy with which Europeans attempted (according to Nietzsche) to climb down into their distant past. "History," Foucault insisted in an essay on Nietzsche's genealogies, "is for cutting." When it comes to the question of race, nearly an entire generation of historians – most of whom share neither Foucault's general program for the writing of history, nor his specific sense of the struggle for sovereignty as the driving force of race – seems to agree, forgetting that a history that cuts too often or too deep is just as fantastic as one whose filiations are too thick.¹³

¹² John Marshall's recent *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture* (Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History Cambridge University Press, 2006) is, among many other things, a masterful demonstration of the ongoing power of these religious models of enmity and pollution in the very age where Foucault sees the emergence of his binaries.

¹³ Following Nietzsche, Foucault (somewhat confusingly) used the term "genealogy" to describe his antithetical alternative to the histories produced by this fantasy, a history that does not "go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things ... [that] does not resemble the evolution of a species or map the destiny of a people." See Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", in Donald Bouchard (ed.), *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, translated by Donald Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 154, 162; and Foucault, *Il faut défendre la société*, p. 10. Numerous scholars have castigated Foucault for some of his periodizations, most notably his argument for a transition from pre-modern "blood" regimes to modern "sexual" ones. 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." See Kathleen Biddick, "The Cut of Genealogy: Pedagogy in the Blood", *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30 (Fall, 2000), 453. Biddick's "always already" may, however, obscure as much as it reveals.

Hence Nietzsche had insisted on an element of formal continuity to the ideas whose history interested him: a “terrifying mask” that these ideas wore across time, impressing them upon generations of human memory and concealing their transformations behind features of unchanging horror. For Nietzsche (unlike Foucault), the history of ideas consisted less in stripping the “mask” from the “actor,” than in developing a dramaturgy appropriate to their interplay.

Be that as it may, the snipping of several generations of historians has by now separated race from whatever masks it may once have worn. Precisely for this reason it seems to me useful to stroll through some more ancient museums of natural history, and imagine race placed amongst their exhibits. What if, for example, we treat race as but one chapter in the long history of the conviction that culture is produced and reproduced in the same way as the species procreates itself? I cannot, in the pages that follow, pretend to provide anything so cosmopolitan as a critical history of this conviction. Nor do I aspire to anything so provincial as a proof that late medieval discriminations were racial. My goal is only to demonstrate that too easy a certainty about where each chapter in a “natural history” of culture begins and ends represses the very processes of contextualization, comparison, and analogy out of which a critical understanding of such histories should emerge. To shift metaphors: it is painfully clear why for the last half century it has been so important to cut a modern straightjacket for histories of race. Perhaps our analyses have reached the point where we may loosen the sleeves, and begin comparing the mad certainties of different times and places. I have chosen one example of what such comparison might look like, the same example with which Ashley Montague confronted his readers, and with which Foucault’s audience confronted him – I mean, of course, the venerable debate over the nature of Christian attitudes toward the Jews – and will focus within that example on the Crowns of Aragon and of Castile in the Middle Ages: the polities that we today call Spain.

Like the more general questions of race with which we began, the debate over the racial nature of anti-Semitism was taken up with new urgency after the rise of National Socialism. Some historians, such as Cecil Roth, saw real affinities between pre-modern ideologies of discrimination (particularly those of late medieval Spain toward Christians descended from Jews) and modern (particularly German) ones, affinities which 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 pre-modern anti-Judaism, and criticized those who thought otherwise for “reading modern racist conceptions into medieval sources.”¹⁴

The extermination of nearly all the Jews of Europe during the Second World War raised the ethical stakes of these debates to heights far greater than those that historical argument generally affords. For some, the gravitational pull of Auschwitz is so strong that all earlier ideologies about Jews become coordinates in a trajectory clearly spiraling toward destruction. Historians of this school (Benzion Netanyahu is an example) make relatively free use of the words “race” and “racism” to describe discriminations against Jews, whether they occurred in Hellenistic Egypt, fifteenth-century Spain, Nazi Germany, or the present.¹⁵ For others, indeed the vast majority, such stakes are unbearably high. They prefer to understand modern racial anti-Semitism as the specific and contingent product of the intersection of capitalism, imperialism, and post-Enlightenment natural science, a phenomenon radically discontinuous with other and earlier histories. The deep cuts of this historicism are (at least in part) designed to relieve more distant pasts from responsibility for an ideology that has come to stand for all that is evil in Europe. Thus Heiko Oberman can reassure us that the Reformation is untainted by racism, because the many negative comments that Reuchlin, Erasmus, and Luther made about Jews, about converts from Judaism, and about their descendents, were based on a purely theological understanding, not a biological one, that we might term anti-Judaism but not anti-Semitism.¹⁶

¹⁴ Salo Baron took an intermediate position, agreeing that medieval people did not have a conscious concept of race in its modern form, but seeing real similarities between the ideologies. See Salo Baron, *Modern Nationalism and Religion* (New York: Harper, 1947), p. 276, n. 26, and p. 15, reformulated in Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 18 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), vol. 13, p. 84ff. Kisch rejected this approach as well, in Guido Kisch, *The Jews of Medieval Germany* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1949), pp. 314–316 and 531, n. 60. The debate is summarized in Yosef Haim Yerushalmi’s classic pamphlet on the topic, *Assimilation and Racial Anti-Semitism: the Iberian and the German Models* (New York: Leo Baeck Institute, 1982), p. 29.

¹⁵ On this tendency in Benzion Netanyahu’s *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain* (New York: Random House, 1995), see David Nirenberg, “El sentido de la historia judía”, *Revista de Libros* 28 (April 1999), 3–5.

¹⁶ Heiko Oberman, *Wurzeln des Antisemitismus. Christenangst und Judenplage im Zeitalter von Humanismus und Reformation*, second edition (Berlin: Severin & Siedler, 1983), p. 63. Oberman’s work is also characteristic of this scholarship in that it makes no attempt to demonstrate assumed differences in the biological knowledge that underlay modern racist anti-Semitism, and that encoded in comments like Martin Luther’s observation (*Weimarer Ausgabe*, vol. 53, p. 481) that the Jews’ poisonous hatred “dass es ihnen durch blut und fleisch, durch Marck und bein gegangen, ganz und gar natur und leben geworden ist. Und so wenig sie fleisch und blut, Marck und bein koennen endern, so wenig koennen sie solchen stolz und neid endern. Sie muessen so bleiben und verderben, Wo Gott nicht sonderlich hohe wunder thut.”

This distinction between a “biological” anti-Semitism associated with modernity and a “cultural” anti-Judaism associated with pre-modernity did not, of course, originate with Oberman. It is what we might call the “Jewish corollary” to the broader axiom about the modernity of race.¹⁷ Every bit as widespread as that axiom, the corollary has itself assumed in most historical circles the status of article of faith, even if a few heretics remain.¹⁸ But there is room for doubt, and the scholarly expression of that doubt tends to cluster around Spain in the late Middle Ages.¹⁹

Iberian history has long served as a focal point for arguments about pre-modern race because, as is well known, large populations of Muslims and

¹⁷ The bibliography on the question of anti-Judaism (non-racial) vs. anti-Semitism (racial) is vast. In addition to the works already cited (e.g. Walz), see, *inter alia*, Peter Herde, “Von der mittelalterlichen Judenfeindschaft zum modernen Antisemitismus”, in Karlheinz Müller and Klaus Wittstadt (eds), *Geschichte und Kultur des Judentums* (Würzburg: Kommissionsverlag F. Schöningh, 1988); Christhard Hoffmann, “Christlicher Antijudaismus und moderner Antisemitismus. Zusammenhänge und Differenzen als Problem der historischen Antisemitismusforschung”, in Leonore Siegele-Wenschkewitz (ed.), *Christlicher Antijudaismus und Antisemitismus. Theologische und kirchliche Programme Deutscher Christen* (Frankfurt am Main: Haag & Herchen, 1994), pp. 293–317; Winfried Frey, “Vom Antijudaismus zum Antisemitismus. Ein antijüdisches Pasquill von 1606 und seine Quellen”, *Daphnis* 18 (1989), 251–279; Johannes Heil, “»Antijudaismus« und »Antisemitismus« – Begriffe als Bedeutungsträger”, *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 6 (1997), 91–114. Gavin Langmuir divided the vocabulary differently in *History, Religion, and Antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), positing a (medieval) shift from rational anti-Judaism to irrational anti-Semitism.

¹⁸ Jonathan Elukin, for example, argued for an “incipient racial ideology” evident in the Christian treatment of converts from Judaism in the Middle Ages. See Jonathan Elukin, “From Jew to Christian? Conversion and Immutability in Medieval Europe”, in James Muldoon (ed.), *Varieties of Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), pp. 171–189, here p. 171. One of the best known cases was addressed by Aryeh Grabois, “From ‘Theological’ to ‘Racial’ Anti-Semitism: The Controversy over the ‘Jewish’ Pope in the Twelfth Century”, [Hebrew] *Zion* 47 (1982), 1–16. Such arguments tend to see evidence of racial thought in medieval assertions about the ongoing Jewishness (or “immutability”) of converts or their descendants, but do not engage in the comparative exploration of medieval theories of immutability with modern racial ones that would seem to me to be a prerequisite for such a claim. For an important survey of medieval Christian attitudes toward converts from Judaism in the eleventh- and twelfth-century Rhineland see Alfred Haverkamp, “Baptized Jews in German Lands During the Twelfth Century”, in Michael Signer and John van Engen (eds), *Jews and Christians in Twelfth Century Europe* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), pp. 255–310 (who does not, however, engage the question of “racial anti-Semitism.”)

¹⁹ This case was of course implicit in the question posed to Foucault, and explicit in the debates between Roth, Kisch, *et al.* Yosef Haim Yerushalmi took up the debate in 1982 (*Assimilation and Racial Anti-Semitism*), comparing late medieval Spanish ideologies that understood Jewishness as carried in the blood with nineteenth-century German anti-Semitic ideologies, and understanding both as recognizably racial. The line of argument was pursued further by Jerome Friedman, “Jewish Conversion, the Spanish Pure Blood Laws, and Reformation: A revisionist view of racial and religious antisemitism”, *Sixteenth Century Journal* 18 (1987), 3–31.

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 1391–1492, for example, all the Jews of Spain either converted or were expelled.²⁰

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, as 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, lindos, limpios*). Moreover, the ideological underpinning of these new discriminations claimed explicitly to be rooted in natural realities, as is most evident in what came to be called 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; and 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 quite 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

²⁰ The population of Jews in the Crown of Aragon dropped from a high of 27–50,000 just before the massacres of 1391, to approximately 9,000 at the time of the expulsion of 1492 (and thereafter, of course, to zero). These figures, which are far below those offered by many historians, are meant primarily to illustrate the scale of the decline. They are taken from Jaume Riera, “Judíos y Conversos en los reinos de la Corona de Aragón durante el siglo, XV”, in *La Expulsión de los Judíos de España* (Castilla–La Mancha: Asociación de Amigos del Museo Sefardí, 1993), pp. 71–90, here p. 78, who, however, provides no evidence for them. Henry Kamen, in his self-consciously revisionist “The Mediterranean and the Expulsion of Spanish Jews in 1492”, *Past and Present* 119 (1988), 30–55, provides very similar numbers, but also adduces no evidence.

things by it.²¹ 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.²² Half a century later (c. 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 accepted racial categories in order to make the argument that the Spanish Inquisition was an instrument of racism.²³

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

²¹ Though in this chapter I will be focussing on the Jewish case, the same phenomenon applies to the historiography of Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula. Examples of racial language in the description of Christian–Muslim relations abound in José María Perceval, *Todos son uno. Arquetipos, xenofobia y racismo. La imagen del morisco en la Monarquía Española durante los siglos XVI y XVII* (Almería: Instituto de Estudios Almerienses, 1997), *passim*, but see for example p. 63.

²² See Leopold von Ranke, *Fürsten und Völker von Süd-Europa im sechszehnten und siebzehnten Jahrhundert*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1837), vol. I, p. 246.

²³ “Locura es pensar que batallas por la existencia, luchas encarnizadas y seculares de razas, terminen de otro modo que con expulsiones o exterminios. La raza inferior sucumbe siempre y acaba por triunfar el principio de nacionalidad más fuerte y vigoroso.” Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, *Historia de los heterodoxos Españoles*, 8 vols. (Madrid, 1882/Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1982), vol. II, p. 379. Compare vol. I, p. 410; vol. II, p. 381. Despite the Darwinian overtones of this passage, and though he everywhere utilizes the vocabulary of race, Menéndez Pelayo nevertheless also claims to reject some of the racial theories of his day (compare vol. I, p. 249: “Sin asentir en manera alguna a la teoría fatalista de las razas ... los árabes ... han sido y son muy poco dados a la filosofía”). Compare Henry Charles Lea, *A History of the Inquisition of Spain*, 4 vols. (New York: AMS Press, 1906/1966), vol. I, p. 126.

of superficial scholars.”²⁴ 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 upon the relevance of the concept of race to Spanish history.²⁵ 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” (p. 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.”²⁶

²⁴ Américo Castro, *The Spaniards, An Introduction to their History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 20. If such a faith lasted longer in Spain than it did in the rest of Western Europe, this is partly because Franco’s triumph allowed Falangist historians to continue celebrating the achievements of the “raza hispanica” for many years. But it should be added that the “faith ... in biological continuity” of Spanish fascists had its own distinctive flavor. Primo de Rivera, for example, could proclaim: “España no se justifica por tener una lengua, ni por ser una raza, ni por ser un acervo de costumbres, sino que España se justifica por una vocación imperial para unir lenguas, para unir razas, para unir pueblos y para unir costumbres en un destino universal.” Cited in Eduardo Gonzalez Calleja and Fredes Limon Nevado, *La hispanidad como instrumento de combate: raza e imperio en la prensa franquista durante la guerra civil española* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1988), pp. 27f. Can we imagine a similar statement from a German fascist?

²⁵ An approach common to Américo Castro’s, *España en su Historia: cristianos, moros y judíos* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1948); *La realidad histórica de España*, Biblioteca Pourra 4 (Mexico City: Editorial Porrua, 1954); *De la edad conflictiva*, Colección Persiles 18 (Madrid: Taurus, 1963); “Español”, *palabra extranjera: razones y motivos*, (Madrid: Taurus, 1970), and *The Spaniards*.

²⁶ Castro, *La realidad histórica*, third edition (1965), p. 5 of the 1965 introduction: “Un viraje mucho más amplio será necesario para incluir en la historiografía futura la presencia positiva y decisiva de las castas (¡no razas!) mora y judía. Porque es notable la resistencia a aceptar que el problema español era de *castas* y no de *razas*, hoy sólo aplicable a quienes se distinguen, como dice el Diccionario de la Academia, ‘por el color de su piel y otros caracteres’.” In this context it is worth pointing out that the *Diccionario* itself actually uses the word “raza” in its definition of the word “antisemita”: “enemigo de la raza hebrea, de su cultura, o de su influencia” (my thanks to Daniel Waissbein for bringing this to my attention). Writing at much the same time as Castro, Nicolas López Martínez, “Teología española de la convivencia a mediados del siglo XV”, *Repertorio de las Ciencias Eclesiásticas de España* 1 (Siglos III–XVI), (Salamanca, 1967), 465–476 embraced the vocabulary Castro rejected. He saw the fifteenth-century drive toward assimilation as “un fenómeno casi biológico” (p. 466), and did not hesitate to speak of race: “Si añadimos la notoria eficacia de la raza hebrea para hacerse con las claves económicas del país, comprenderemos ... que, a veces, por motivos inmediatos aparentemente fútiles, se haga

This repudiation of race depends upon familiar strategies: the focus on the *Diccionario's* definition of race as referring only to skin color (he ignored the ominous “Y otros caracteres”); and the conjuration of an easily dismissed “true” biological racism based solely on external physical characteristics.²⁷

Castro's approach to race is the one point of his *oeuvre* with which nearly all Spanish and French scholars of peninsular history concur. 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.” The fact that the few dissenting voices are mostly North American has perhaps contributed to the polarization, as Spanish scholars have sought to distance themselves from what they perceive to be an excessive willingness of “Anglo-Saxon” scholars to project the racial histories of their own lands onto that of Spain.²⁸

guerra sin cuartel” (p. 467). “Como se ve, pretendía una discriminación semejante a la que, todavía en nuestros tiempos, se basa exclusivamente en motivos de raza o del color de la piel” (p. 468).

²⁷ One might further complain that late medieval and early modern Spaniards were perfectly capable of believing that Jews and *conversos* actually *were* distinguished by physical characteristics, such as large noses. Lope de Vega pokes fun at precisely this belief in Vega, *Amar sin saber a quién, Edición de Carmen Bravo-Villasante* (Salamanca: Anaya, 1967), p. 10, “Largas hay con hidalguía/ y muchas cortas sin ella.” See Maria Rosa Lida de Malkiel, “Lope de Vega y los judíos”, *Bulletin Hispanique* 75 (1973), 73–112, here 88.

²⁸ Francisco Márquez Villanueva, “El problema de los conversos: Cuatro Puntos Cardinales”, in Joseph Sola-Solé *et al.* (eds), *Hispania Judaica I: History*, (Barcelona: Puvill-Editor, 1985), p. 61: “Por lo pronto, el problema de los cristianos nuevos no era, en absoluto, de indole *racial*, sino social, y secundariamente, religioso. No se pierda de vista que el converso no llevaba consigo en todo momento un estigma biológico indeleble”; Adeline Rucquoi, “Noblesse des conversos?” in “*Qu'un Sang Impur...*” *Les Conversos et le pouvoir en Espagne à la fin du moyen âge*, *Etudes Hispaniques* 23 (Aix-en-Provence: Publication de l'Université de Provence, 1997), pp. 89–108. For a representative critique of “Anglo-Saxon” historiography on these grounds, albeit on a slightly different issue, see Mercedes García-Arenal and Béatrice Leroy, *Moros y judíos en Navarra en la baja Edad Media* (Madrid: Hiperion, 1984), pp. 13f.:

El interés por la cuestión ha sido promovido principalmente por estudiosos anglosajones preocupados por problemas actuales de minorías dentro de sus propios países, y en ocasiones planteamientos u ópticas válidas para sociedades posteriores a los imperialismos occidentales han sido aplicadas a la Edad Media española con resultados deformantes y anacrónicos. Sobre todo ha hecho que se barajen conceptos muy semejantes a

Each of these repudiations of race has been of undoubted strategic importance. There were, for example, many Spanish scholars who did maintain that Jews and Muslims were members of races inferior to the “raza hispanica,” and Américo Castro’s attack against that vocabulary helped bring these groups back into the mainstream of Spanish history and culture. But such strategic skirmishes cannot alone conquer the vast complex of ideas about the reproduction of culture that they claim to target. Indeed unless they open a path for heavier engagements, they risk being stranded behind enemy lines. Castro’s easy isolation of race in the epidermis, for example, blinded him to the ways in which his methodology simply displaced many of the naturalizing and essentializing functions of “race” into the less charged term of “caste” (much as many speakers today use “ethnicity”). There is in fact a close kinship between Castro’s “Semitic caste” and “Semitic culture” and Ernest Renan’s “Semitic race.”²⁹ 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. “Inquisitorial 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.”³⁰

los de la vieja bibliografía polémica de finales del siglo pasado, conceptos que en este estudio se intentarán evitar.

In Mercedes García-Arenal, *Inquisición y moriscos, los procesos del Tribunal de Cuenca*, second edition (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno, 1983), p. 116, she suggests that although today anti-Muslim attitudes are racial, four centuries ago they were religious. On the question of an Anglo-American vision of Spanish history, see Ángel Galán Sánchez, *Una visión de la ‘decadencia española’: la historiografía anglosajona sobre mudéjares y moriscos, siglos XVIII–XX*, Colección “Monografías” 4 (Málaga: Servicio de Publicaciones, Diputación Provincial de Málaga, 1991). Nevertheless the word “raza” is still sometimes applied to the Jews by Spanish historians writing today, e.g. Ramon González Ruiz, “El Bachiller Palma y su obra de polémica proconversa”, in “*Qu’un sang impur...*”, p. 48: “Palma ... guarda una natural vinculación con los hombres de su raza convertidos al cristianismo.”

²⁹ On the racial nature of Renan’s categories see Shmuel Almog, “The Racial Motif to Renan’s Attitude to Jews and Judaism”, in Shmuel Almog (ed.), *Antisemitism through the Ages* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988), pp. 255–278.

³⁰ The quotes are from Américo Castro, *The Structure of Spanish History*, translated by Edmund L. King (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954), pp. 542–543, 569. In a review of the Spanish version of the work (Castro, *España en su historia*) Yakov Malkiel rather mildly observed that Castro’s approach resembled theories of cultural transmission discredited by association with National Socialism. Marquce Villanueva, on the other

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 the champion of the “*raza hispana*” and Castro’s arch-rival, Claudio Sánchez Albornoz³¹), 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 reject biological explanations for cultural transmission, they rely 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 of its exponent, a type of logic that has turned many Iberianists into methodological disciples of Inquisitors.³² 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.³³

Thus far my argument has been entirely “negative,” first criticizing the terms in which questions about race in the pre-modern period have been asked by others; then suggesting that, at the rather gross level of historiography, those terms are much the same whether we are talking of race generally, of the Jewish case more specifically, or of the singular example of Spain. But of course each case differs a great deal in its particulars, and it is through a focus on those particulars in the Spanish case that I will attempt to provide a more “positive” example of the cognitive benefits that may flow from emphasizing, rather than eliding, the medieval vocabularies through which “naturalizations” of difference were expressed. The history of the Romance word “*raza*,” from whence the English “race,”

hand, praised precisely these pages as “the most acute and fruitful of [Castro’s] oeuvre.” See his ‘El problema de los conversos’, pp. 51–75, here p. 69. The piece originally appeared in a Castro Festschrift in 1965.

³¹ A convergence pointed out by Benzion Netanyahu in his *Toward the Inquisition: Essays on Jewish and Converso History in Late Medieval Spain* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), chapters 1 and 5. For a good example of Sánchez-Albornoz’s agreement with Castro on this score, see Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz, *España: un Enigma Histórico*, 2 vols. (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1962), vol. 2, pp. 16, 255.

³² Thus Márquez Villanueva, seeking to prove that (*pace* Horace) the literary figure of the procreus or go-between is a “semitic” trope, writes of one author (Feliciano de Silva) that, although his ancestry is not certain, he “looks highly suspicious, given his marriage to a lady of known Jewish lineage and his life-long affinity with the *converso* literary milieu.” See Francisco Márquez Villanueva, “*La Celestina* as Hispano-Semitic Anthropology”, *Revue de Littérature Comparée* 61 (1987), 425–453, here 452, n. 2. The association of particular intellectual positions or literary interests with “judaizing,” so prominent a feature of the Inquisition, has also become a prominent strategy of essentialization among a particular school of Spanish philologists in the United States.

³³ Castro expressed surprise at this in his introduction to *The Spaniards*.

provides an obvious starting point. The Castilian word does cover a broad semantic field,³⁴ 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 pre-modern "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. Had he been willing to apply the same technique to the word *raza*, he would have found that it too is a word with a suggestive history in the various Romances of the peninsula.

Already in the early fifteenth century "raza," "casta," and "linaje" (race, caste, lineage) were part of a complex of closely associated terms that linked both behavior and appearance to nature and reproduction. Some of these words, like the word "lineage" itself, had long been used to tie character to genealogy, and the history of that usage was largely independent of "Jewish" questions, although it could easily be extended to them. Writing around 1435, for example, the chronicler/historian Gutierre Díez de Games explained 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."³⁵

The Castilian word "raza," however, was much newer, and it seems to have come into broad usage as a term in the animal and the human sciences more or less simultaneously. Although the earliest use I know of in Castilian deploys the term to refer to a hoof disease in horses, among breeders the word "raza" quickly came to mean, in the first quarter of the fifteenth century, something like "pedigree."³⁶ Thus Manuel Dies's

³⁴ Ricardo del Arco Garay, for example, could speak of a "raza Aragonesa," and José Plá of a "raza hispanica" which encompassed all of Spain and Latin America. See Ricardo del Arco Garay, *Figuras Aragonesas: El genio de la raza* (Zaragoza: Tip. Heraldo de Aragón, 1923-6), and José Plá, (ed.), *La misión internacional de la raza hispanica* (Madrid: Javier Morata, 1928), just two among countless examples.

³⁵ Juan de Mata Carriazo (ed.), *El Victorial: Crónica de don Pero Niña, conde de Buelna, por su alférez Gutierre Díez de Games* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1940), p. 17: "desde la muerte de Alexandre acá nunca traición se hizo que no fuese judío o su linaxe." For the dating of these lines, see p. xiii.

³⁶ See Teodorico Borgognoni, "Libro de los Caballos", Ms. Escorial b-IV-3, in John O'Neill (ed.), *Electronic Texts and Concordances, Madison Corpus of Early Spanish Manuscripts and Printings* (CDROM), (Madison and New York: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1999): "La.x. titulo dela enfermedat. que dizen raza. // Faze se alos cauallos una malautia quell dizen Raça. Et faze se de sequedat dela unna." Gianfranco Contini gave a related etymology for "raza" in his "Tombeau de Leo Spitzer", in *Varianti e altra linguistica. Una raccolta di saggi, (1938-1968)* (Turin: Einaudi, 1970), pp. 651-660. There he argued that Spitzer's derivation of Romance "raza" from Latin "ratio" was incorrect, and drew the etymology instead from "haraz/haras," the breeding of horses, the stallion's deposit.

popular manual on equine care (written c. 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 contraries. 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.³⁷

At more or less the same time in Castilian poetry, “raza” emerged as a way of describing a variety of defects linked to poetic speech, to sexuality, and especially to Judaism.³⁸ Francisco Imperial, whose Italianate verse had an important impact on the Castilian lyric tradition, addressed an exhortatory poem to the king in 1407 which provides an ambiguous but early example of this last: “A los tus suçessores claro espejo/ sera mira el golpe de la maça./sera miral el cuchillo bermejo/que cortara doquier que falle Raza/... /biua el Rey do justiça ensalça.” 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

³⁷ Manuel Dies, “Libre de la menescalia”, c. 1424–1436, Biblioteca General i Històrica de la Universitat de València, Ms. 631, llib. I (Libre de cavalls), cap. 1 (Com deu ésser engendrat cavall): “car no ha animal nengú <que> tant semble ne retraga al pare en les bondats hi en les bellees, ni en la talla, ni en lo pèl, e axi per lo contrari. Axi que cové qui vol haver bona raça o casta de cavalls que sobretot cerch lo guarà o stalló que sia bo e bell e de bon pèl, e la egua gran e ben formada e de bon pèl.” There is a forthcoming edition by Lluís Cifuentes in the series *Els Nostres Clàssics*. For the Castilian translation by Martín Martínez de Ampíes, see Manuel Dies, *Libro de albeiteria* (Zaragoza: Pablo Hurus 1495, reprinted 1499). There is a transcription of the 1499 edition by Antonio Cortijo and Angel Gómez Moreno in the Archivo digital de manuscritos y textos españoles [= ADMYTE], (Madrid: 1992), disc I, number 32:

lib. I (Libro de los cavallos), cap. 1 (En qué manera deve el cavallo ser engendrado):

El cavallo deve ser engendrado de garañón que haya buen pelo, y sea bien sano y muy enxuto de manos, canillas, rodillas y pieses. Y deve mirar en ésto mucho, que en él no haya mal vicio alguno, porque entre todos los animales no se falla otro que al padre tanto sea semejante en las bondades, belleza ni talle, ni en el pelo, y por el contrario en todo lo malo. Por ende, es muy necessario a qualquier persona que haver codicia raça o casta buena y fermosa cercar garañón muy escogido en pelo, tamaño y en la bondad, y la yegua creçida y bien formada y de buen pelo.

³⁸ For an example of “raça” as referring to a defect in poetic performance, see Brian Dutton and Joaquin Gonzalez Cuenca (eds.), *Cancionero de Juan Alfonso de Baena* (Madrid: Visor Libros, 1993), Baena to Lando, #363, pp. 641–642: “Fernand manuel, por que versefique/ donaires mi lengua sin raça e polilla,/sabad que vos mando de mula pardilla/dozena de festes en el quadrupliche” (ll. 9–12. festes: horse turdlets). In early usages the word seems also to have designated sexual defects, and was in this sense used to refer to procuresses and prostitutes. Compare in the same Cancionero #496 (p. 339, line 17) and (perhaps the earliest usage) #100, by Alfonso Álvarez de Villasandino (p. 127, line 10).

otherwise, as does his echo of the exhortation, commonly addressed to Trastamaran kings of Castile, that they defeat that Jewish beast.³⁹

In any event, the “Jewishness” of the defects encoded in “raza” soon became more obvious, and as they did so they were enriched with meanings drawn from the more agricultural corners of the word’s semantic field. Alfonso Martínez de Toledo, writing around 1438 in the midst of an evolving conflict over *converso* office-holding in Toledo (on which see more below), provides a clear example of the developing logic. 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, the 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.⁴⁰

I will return in a moment to the strenuous debate that developed over this incipient claim that political rights should be dependent on proper “race.” But first it is worth insisting that the language of this claim was already saturated with resonance to what contemporaries held to be

³⁹ “Desir de miçer Francisco a las syete virtudes,” lines 393–400, in Dutton and Gonzalez Cuenca, *Cancionero*, p. 316. Writing c. 1432, Juan Alfonso de Baena also linked good kingship to the elimination of “Raza”: “quitastes/del reyno todas las raças”. See his “Desir que fiso Juan Alfonso de Baena,” lines 1183–84, in p. 766. Against my view of this early association between “raza” and Judaism see María Rosa Lida, “Un decir más de Francisco Imperial: Respuesta a Fernán Pérez de Guzmán”, *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica* 1 (1947), 170–177, and Leo Spitzer’s article, “Ratio>Race”, in *Essays in Historical Semantics* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1948), pp. 47–69, cited therein. See also Joan Corominas, *Diccionario crítico etimológico de la lengua castellana*, 4 vols. (Bern: Editorial Francke, 1954), vol. III, pp. 1019–1021, sub “raza.”

⁴⁰ Alfonso Martínez de Toledo and Michael Gerli (eds), *Arcipreste de Talavera o Corbacho*, fourth edition (Madrid: Catedra, 1992), ch. 18, pp. 108f. : “asi lo verás de cada día en los logares do bivieres, que el bueno e de buena raça todavía retrae do viene, e el desaventurado de vil raça e linaje, por grande que sea e mucho que tenga, nunca retraerá sinón a la vileza donde desçiende Por ende, quando los tales o las tales tienen poderío no usan dél como deven, como dize el enxemplo: ‘Vidose el perro en bragas de cerro, e non conosció a su compañero.’”

“common sense” knowledge about the reproductive systems of the natural world.⁴¹ It is the marriage of these two domains, of political disability and of reproductive fitness, which is so well reflected in the famous definition of the word “raza” that Sebastian de Covarrubias provided in his Spanish dictionary of 1611: “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.”⁴²

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.⁴³ Nor, I hasten to add, was this logic in any way peculiar to Spain. Writing in 1538, in praise of the King of France, the Italian 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 (c. 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 carefully should a king provide
For the race, which is his principal power?⁴⁴

⁴¹ Of course much of this knowledge predated the Middle Ages, as a glance at Aristotle’s *History of Animals* (7.6 on the resemblance of children to their parents, and compare his *On the Generation of Animals* I.17–18), or Xenophon’s *On Hunting* (III, VII on breeding of dogs), makes clear.

⁴² Sebastian de Covarrubias, *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o Española* (Madrid: Por L. Sanchez, impressor del rey n.s., 1611) sub “raza”: “La casta de cavallos castizos, a los quales señalan con hierro para que sean conocidos . . . Raza, en los linajes se toma en mala parte, como tener aguna raza de moro o judío.” Examples of such usage are legion. A particularly famous one is that of Juan de Pineda, *Diálogos Familiares de la Agricultura Cristiana*, 5 vols. (Salamanca: P. de Adurça y Diego Lopez, 1589), vol. II, xxi, sec. 14: “Ningún cuerdo quiere muger con raza de judía ni de marrana.”

⁴³ The topic of medieval knowledge about animal breeding is only now beginning to be studied. See, for example, Charles Gladitz, *Horse Breeding in the Medieval World* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997). The well known contribution of knowledge about animal breeding to the development of biological discourses about evolution in the eighteenth and nineteenth century suggests that for our purposes the topic would repay further research.

⁴⁴ Jacobus Sadoletus, *De pueris recte ac liberaliter instituendis* (Basel, 1538), p. 2: “Maxime autem in hoc laudanda Francisci Regis nostri sapientia est, et consilium summo principe dignum, qui quod caeteri fere in equis et canibus, ipse praecipue in uiris facit, ut prouidentiam omnem adhibeat, quo ex spectatis utrinque generibus electi in hoc sanctum foedus matrimonii conueniant, ut ex bonis parentibus nascatur progenies, que postea et Regi , et patriae possit esse utilis.” Cited in Walz, “Der vormoderne Antisemitismus”, p. 727. Joachim du Bellay, “Ample Discours au Roy sur le Faict des quatre Estats du Royaume de France”, in Henri Chamard (ed.), *Oeuvres Poétiques* (Paris: Droz, 1931), vol. XI, p. 205, and Jouanna, *L’idée de Race en France*, vol. III, p. 1323: “Car si des bons chevaux et des bons chiens de chasse/ Nous sommes si soigneux de conseruer la

The point, in short, is that words like *raza*, *casta*, and *linaje* (and their cognates in the various Iberian romance languages) were already embedded in identifiably biological ideas about animal breeding and reproduction in the first half of the fifteenth century. Moreover, the sudden and explicit application of this vocabulary to Jews coincides chronologically (the 1430s) with the appearance of an anti-*converso* ideology (already encountered in the example of Alfonso Martínez de Toledo) which sought to establish new religious categories and discriminations, and legitimate these by naturalizing their reproduction. One of the earliest legislative examples comes from 1433. It was on the 10th of January 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 descendents on the other, a decree which implies that some people were attempting to make precisely those distinctions.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶

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 “cristianos de natura” from holding the office of notary; in 1437 the town council of Lleida attempted to strip *conversos* of broker’s licenses.⁴⁷ The converts of Catalonia and Valencia felt compelled to appeal to the pope, and in 1437

race,/Combien plus doit un Roy soigneusement pourvoir/ A la race, qui est son principal pouvoir?” I cite non-peninsular texts in order to stress that, *pace* the Black Legend, there is nothing specifically Iberian about these strategies of naturalization. They are pan-European, as much Protestant as Catholic. See, e.g., the citation from Martin Luther above.

⁴⁵ Archive of the Crown of Aragon (ACA):C 3124:157r-v: “separatio aut differentia nulla fiat inter christianos a progenie seu natura et neophytos ... et ex eis descendentes.” The use of the word “by nature” to distinguish Old Christians was already common by this date.

⁴⁶ “Et quoniam per gratiam baptismi cives sanctorum & domestici Dei efficiuntur, longeque dignius sit regenerari spiritu, quam nasci carne, hac edictali lege statuimus, ut civitatum & locorum, in quibus sacro baptismate regenerantur, privilegiis, libertatibus & immunitatibus gaudeant, quae ratione duntaxat nativitatis & originis alii consequuntur.” Joannes Dominicus Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, 54 vols. (Florence, 1759 f./reprint Graz: Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt, 1961), vol. 29, p. 100.

⁴⁷ ACA:C 2592:21r–22v; Raimundo Noguera Guzmán and José Maria Madurell Marimón (eds), *Privilegios y ordenanzas históricas de los notarios de Barcelona* (Barcelona: [s.n], 1965), doc. 57; Pedro Sanahuja, *Lérida en sus luchas por la fe (judíos, moros, conversos, Inquisición, moriscos)* (Lleida: [s.n], 1946), pp. 103–110. See Riera, “Judíos y conversos”, pp. 86–87.

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.”⁴⁸ Similar attempts took place in Castile. In Seville, an anti-monarchical rebellion may have planned to murder the *converso* population in 1433–4, and ten years later, still in the midst of civil war, King Juan II was 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.”⁴⁹

The vocabulary of race evolved under the pressure of this conflict, as words like “raza,” “casta,” “linaje,” and even “natura” herself were applied to converts and their descendents. By 1470 the word “race” was so common in poetry that Pero Guillén included it (along with other useful words like “marrano”) in his *Gaya ciencia*, a handbook of rhymes for poets.⁵⁰ The “cristiano 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-worshipping gentiles.⁵¹ Such remarks encode histories that are too complicated to address here, but they suggest that the converts responded to the *Naturgeschichte* of “clean Christians” with genealogies of their own.⁵² 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

⁴⁸ Vicente Beltrán de Heredia, “Las bulas de Nicolás Vacerca de los conversos de Castilla”, *Sefarad* 21 (1961), 37–38. Recall that the council of Basel had included an exhortation to the *conversos* that they marry Old Christians: “curent & studeant neophytos ipsos cum originariis Christianis matrimonio copulare.”

⁴⁹ Juan de Mata Carriazo (ed.), *Crónica del Halconero de Juan II*, Colección de Crónicas Españolas 8 (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1946), p. 152; Netanyahu, *Origins of the Inquisition*, pp. 284–292.

⁵⁰ See Jose Maria Casas Homs (ed.), *La gaya ciencia de P. Guillén de Segovia*, 2 vols. (Madrid: CSIC, 1962), sub “raça.”

⁵¹ Encarnación Marín Padilla, *Relación judeoconversa durante la segunda mitad del siglo XV en Aragón: La Ley* (Madrid: [s.n.], 1988), pp. 60–67.

⁵² For a fuller exploration of the dialogic evolution of genealogical thinking among Jews, Christians, and converts in fifteenth-century Spain, see David Nirenberg, “Mass Conversion and Genealogical Mentalities: Jews and Christians in Fifteenth-Century Spain”, *Past and Present* 174 (Feb. 2002), 3–41.

extensively to converts from Judaism.⁵³ This logic of lineage was not a priori prejudicial to converts: some writers on nobility and genealogy even argued, as did Diego de Valera c. 1441, that descent from the “chosen people” ennobled rather than debased the “New Christians.”⁵⁴ But in fact throughout the middle decades of the fifteenth century, these naturalizations came increasingly to be deployed against them.

The Toledan revolt of 1449 against the monarchy and the *conversos* as its perceived agents provides a good example of such deployment. The Toledans and their sympathizers were clearly anxious that the converts posed a threat to the reproduction of social and political status. Thus they claimed that “baptised Jews and those proceeding from their damaged line” were waging an implacable and cruel war against Christianity. Their conversions were motivated only by ambition for office and “carnal lust for nuns and [Christian] virgins.” *Marrano* physicians even 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*).⁵⁵ Arguing that all those “descended from the

⁵³ On these changing notions of nobility see Rucquoi, “Noblesse des conversos?”, pp. 89–108, and Adeline Rucquoi, “Etre noble en Espagne aux XIV^e–XVI^e siècles”, in Otto G. Oexle and Werner Paravicini (eds), *Nobilitas: Funktion und Repräsentation des Adels in Alteuropa* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), pp. 273–298. On evolving chivalric ideology, see Jesus D. Rodríguez Velasco, *El debate sobre la caballería en el siglo XV: la tratadística caballeresca castellana en su marco europeo*, Collection de estudios de historia (Valladolid [Salamanca]: Junta de Castilla y León, Consejería de Educación y Cultura, 1996).

⁵⁴ Diego de Valera, “Espejo de la verdadera nobleza”, in Mario Penna (ed.), *Prosistas castellanos del siglo XV*, Biblioteca de Autores Españoles 116, (Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1959), pp. 102–103: “si los convertidos ... retienen la nobleza de su linaje después de christianos ... en qué nasción tantos nobles fallarse pueden ... Dios ... el qual este linaje escogió para sí por el más noble?” The converts’ possession of the blood of Jesus and Mary remained a standard argument in defense of *converso* rights well into the sixteenth century (more on this below). Apologizing for any embarrassment he might cause to the descendants of *conversos*, Joan Antonio Llorente, the author of the first critical history of the Inquisition, used the same argument to insist that such descent was cause not for shame but for pride. See Joan Antonio Llorente, *Histoire Critique de l’Inquisition depuis l’époque de son établissement par Ferdinand V, jusqu’au règne de Ferdinand VII, tirée des pièces originales des archives du Conseil de la Supreme, et de celles des tribunaux subalternes du Saint-office* (Paris: Treuttel et Würz, 1817), p. 24.

⁵⁵ These accusations are made by the Bachelor Marco García de Mora in his brief defending the anti-*converso* activities of the rebel government of Toledo. See Eloy Benito Ruano, “El Memorial del bachiller Marcos García de Mora contra los conversos”, *Sefarad* 17 (1957), 314–351 [reprinted in his *Los orígenes del problema converso* (Barcelona: El Albir, 1976), pp. 95–132, here pp. 103, 111, 118]. Similar charges, with the addition of those against *Marrano* physicians, are made in a fifteenth-century manuscript by an anonymous author whose relationship to the Toledan rebels is unclear. See the “Privilegio de Don Juan II en favor de un Hidalgo”, BNM Ms. 13043, fols. 172–177. The text is edited in *Sales españolas; o, Agudezas del ingenio nacional. Recogidas por Antonio Paz y Meliá*, Biblioteca de Autores Españoles 176 (Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1964), pp. 25–28, here p. 26.

perverse lineage of the Jews” were, like their ancestors in ancient times, “enemies” who sought above all “to destroy all the Old Christians,” the Toledans set about confronting the danger, first with violence, and then with a “Sentencia-Estatuto” banning descendents of converts from holding public office for at least four generations: the first of what would soon be many Spanish statutes of “purity of blood.”⁵⁶

The texts produced by the rebels and their allies in defense of their position, and by opponents like Alonso de Cartagena, Juan de Torquemada, Lope de Barrientos, and Fernán Díaz de Toledo against it, became central texts in the Spanish debate over the “Jewishness” of converts and their descendents. 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, such as pedagogy and nurture, which did not necessarily invoke nature, inheritance, or sexual reproduction.⁵⁷

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*, an anonymous work composed c. 1455–65. The treatise maps the 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.) who 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

⁵⁶ The “Sentencia Estatuto” is published by Fritz Baer, *Die Juden im christlichen Spanien*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1936), vol. II, #302, pp. 315–317. On these texts see especially Eloy Benito Ruano, “La ‘Sentencia-Estatuto’ de Pero Sarmiento contra los conversos Toledanos”, *Revista de la Universidad de Madrid* 6 (1957), 277–306; Benito Ruano, “D. Pero Sarmiento, repostero mayor de Juan II de Castilla”, *Hispania* 17 (1957), 483–454; Benito Ruano, “El Memorial del bachiller Marcos García de Mora” 314–351.

⁵⁷ The lines of difference between these various ways are, however, not always easy to establish. 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” (ASV, Reg. Vat. 470, fol. 201r-v [=Simonsohn #856]). Since Pedro de la Caballeria was himself also a *converso*, the problem here is one of pedagogy and nurture, not inheritance. Steven Kruger seems not to realize that Pedro is a *converso*, and argues for this text as evidence of a racial notion of Judaism in his “Conversion and Medieval Sexual, Religious, and Racial Categories”, in Karma Lochrie *et al.* (eds), *Constructing Medieval Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 158–179, here pp. 169f.

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.”⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁹

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.⁶⁰ 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, first, Adam with animals and second, 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

⁵⁸ “Tratado del Alborayque”, BNM ms. 17567. The quote is from fol. 11r. Dwayne Carpenter is preparing a critical edition of the manuscript and printed versions of this important text. In the meantime Moshe Lazar provides an edition of the text based on BNP ms. Esp. 356: Moshe Lazar, “Anti-Jewish and anti-*converso* propaganda: Confutatio Libri talmud and Alborayque”, in Moshe Lazar and Stephen Haliczer (eds), *The Jews of Spain and the Expulsion of 1492* (Lancaster, CA: Labyrinthos, 1997), pp. 153–236.

⁵⁹ Once again these argumentative strategies seem to be quickly mirrored in Jewish sources. Shem Tov b. Joseph ibn Sem Tov, writing in the 1480s, made a similarly “metallurgical” argument: “If a person is of pure blood and has a noble lineage, he will give birth to a son like himself, and he who is ugly and stained (of blood?) will give birth to a son who is similar to him, for gold will give birth to gold and silver will give birth to silver and copper to copper, and if you find some rare instances that from lesser people sprang out greater ones, nevertheless in most cases what I have said is correct, and as you know, a science is not built on exceptions.” Shem Tov ben Joseph ibn Shem Tov, *Derashot* (Salonika 1525/ Jerusalem 1973), 14a col. b, cited in Eleazar Gutwirth, “Lineage in XVth Century Hispano-Jewish Thought”, *Miscelanea de estudios arabes y hebraicos* 34 (1985), 85–91, here 88.

⁶⁰ A number of fourteenth-century polemics stressed the hybrid nature of the Jewish people. One influential tradition maintained that since Titus had put no Jewish women aboard the ships that carried the survivors of the siege of Jerusalem into the Diaspora, the males had taken Muslim or pagan women to wife, so that their descendants were not real Jews but only bastards, with no claim to the covenant. See Josep Hernando i Delgado, “Un tractat anònim *Adversus iudaeos* en català”, in Frederic Raurell (ed.), *Paraula i història. Miscel·lània P. Basili de Rubí* (Barcelona: Edicions Franciscanes, 1986), p. 730; Jose Maria Millás Vallicrosa, “Un tratado anónimo de polémica contra los judíos”, *Sefarad* 13 (1953), 28; and the Castilian polemic written c. 1370 but preserved in a fifteenth-century manuscript: “Coloquio entre un Cristiano y un Judío”, Biblioteca del Palacio, Ms. 1344, fols. 106r-v. (Also in the recent edition by Aitor García Moreno, *Coloquio entre un cristiano y un judío*, [London: Queen Mary, University of London, 2003], pp. 154–155.)

the sow their adoptive mother.⁶¹ 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.⁶² I know of no more extensive pre-modern discussion about the relationship between biology and culture than that in the literature produced in the debate over *converso* exclusion between 1449 and 1550.⁶³ But the logic of the *Alborayque*, with its mapping of “Judaizing” corruption onto reproductive hybridity, was eventually victorious. The victory of this logic was due, in part, to the fact that it resonated so well with other registers of cultural reproduction in late medieval Iberian society. Defenders of the *conversos* could insist, as they all did, that the reproduction of the flesh could not limit the miraculously transforming power of God working through the sacrament of baptism: it was, after all, dogma that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek. But when it came to other areas of culture in which behavior and lineage were traditionally tightly linked, even the most eloquent among them could not attempt to dissociate the two.

Perhaps the most important of such questions was whether or not descendants of Jews could form part of the nobility. A negative answer like that of the Toledan rebels (not even the king’s grace could make descendants of such a debased lineage noble) would effectively bar the New Christians from any number of rights and privileges. But a positive one seemed to require the discovery among them of either an aristocratic

⁶¹ Alonso de Espina, *Fortalitiū Fidei, consideratio ii*, editio princeps, (Nuremberg: Anton Koberger, 1494), fol. 79, col. d. See Alisa Meyuhās Ginio, *De bello iudaeorum: Fray Alonso de Espina y su Fortalitiū Fidei*, *Fontes Iudaeorum Regni Castellae* 8 (Salamanca: Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, 1998), pp. 16–17. See also Netanyahu, *Origins of the Inquisition*, p. 83; Ana Echevarria, *The Fortress of Faith: the Attitude toward Muslims in Fifteenth-Century Spain* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), p. 167.

⁶² The arrival of the *Tratado del Alborayque* in Guadalupe, for example, provoked a bitter schism that was later remembered by the friars as the defining moment in relations between Old and New Christians in the monastery. See Gretchen D. Starr-Lebeau, *In the Shadow of the Virgin: Inquisitors, Friars, and Conversos in Guadalupe, Spain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

⁶³ The scholarship on purity of blood statutes is too large to summarize here. Early and foundational contributions include Albert Sicroff, *Les controverses des statuts de “pureté de sang” en Espagne du x^e au xvii^e siècle* (Paris: Didier, 1960); Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, *La clase social de los conversos en Castilla en la Edad Moderna* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1955); I. S. Revah, “La controverse sur les statuts de pureté de sang”, *Bulletin Hispanique* 63 (1971), 263–316.

lineage or an aptitude for heroism – since military valor was generally understood as the causal foundation of nobility in fifteenth-century peninsular society. Thus advocates for the New Christians found themselves simultaneously preaching “woe to those who build a city on blood” (Habbakuk 2:12); and insisting through genealogies of extremely “longue durée” that the converts recuperated the nobility of the Israelites – which had lain dormant within the Jews for the millennium and a half that they had denied Jesus – and shared the same blood as God and His virgin mother.⁶⁴

Similarly with the question of courage: the Bachelor Marcos deployed a common prejudice when he wrote that the “ruinous lineage” of the Jews conveyed cowardice to their Christian descendants, for the timidity of the Jews was proverbial in the Middle Ages.⁶⁵ Again, Alonso de Cartagena’s counter-argument did not entirely reject his opponent’s theses about the biological reproduction of culture, but argued rather for a different starting point. The Old Testament had famously chronicled the courage of the ancient Israelites, and

as Aristotle would have it, among dispositions toward virtue none is more derived among descendants through propagation of the blood than the disposition that tends toward fortitude Therefore since, considering their small number, proportionally more from among these [descendants of Jews] rise to investiture in the orders of knighthood, than from among those who descend from some rustic family of ignoble commoners ... it follows that we should presume that the nobility that some of them had in ancient times, lies latent enclosed within their breasts.

⁶⁴ Diego de Valera, “Espejo de la verdadera nobleza”, pp. 102–103 is an early example of such an argument. Alonso de Cartagena, *Defensorium unitatis christianae* ed. P. Manuel Alonso (Madrid: C. Bermejo, 1943), is another prominent example. The citation of Habakkuk is from Cardinal Juan de Torquemada, who then goes on to suggest that the converts deserve special honor because of the genealogy they share with Jesus. See Juan de Torquemada, Nicolas López Martínez and Vicente Proaño Gil Burgos (eds.), *Tractatus contra Madianitas et Ismaelitas* (Burgos: Seminario Metropolitano de Burgos, 1957), p. 123.

⁶⁵ Proverbially timorous: Alonso de Cartagena, *Defensorium unitatis christianae*, II.iv. 20, p. 215: “when we want to express excessive timidity, we call it Jewishness, and we usually call a man who is excessively fearful a Jew.” This passage (as well as the next I will quote from Cartagena) is helpfully discussed (toward a different conclusion) in Bruce Rosenstock, *New Men: Conversos, Christian Theology, and Society in Fifteenth-Century Castile* (London: Queen Mary and Westfield College, 2002), pp. 47–49. Marcos on “ruin linaxe”: “El Memorial del bachiller Marcos García de Mora,” p. 112. A few decades earlier, St. Vincent Ferrer bemoaned that Christians would insult as “Jews” other Christians who refused to participate in violence or vengeance. See St. Vincent Ferrer, *Sermons*, vol. I, pp. 42, 93, 155; III, 16; V, 190.

Once the Jewish vessel is baptized, the fortitude encoded in its ancient blood is free to shine once more, like a bright light whose concealing bushel is removed.⁶⁶

Alonso de Cartagena's claims about the "deep heritability" of courage and nobility, like those of other pro-*converso* writers, are based on a reading of Aristotelian natural science that is very similar to that of Manuel Dies' horse-breeding manual, or indeed to that of those anti-*converso* writers who emphasized the "ruinous lineages" of the Jews.⁶⁷ This congruence is not evidence of the pro-*converso* party's hypocrisy (as many of their opponents claimed at the time, and some scholars still do today), but of the differential densities of reproductive logics across the many registers of a complex culture. The victory of the anti-*converso* movement consisted in extending the power of ideas about heritability from certain areas where they were already thickly rooted (such as in discourses of animal breeding and of aristocratic genealogy) to previously inhospitable soil (such as sacramental theology). To the degree that this victory extended the cultivation of "raza" into new corners of culture and society, we can literally say that it made fifteenth-century Spain more "racial."

The consequences of this 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 descendants of *conversos*, believed that rooting out the heresies of the few would prove the innocence of the majority. Indeed he found little evidence for the charges against the converts, 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 flesh's genealogy.

⁶⁶ Alonso de Cartagena, *Defensorium unitatis christianae*, II.iv.20, p. 217.

⁶⁷ There were other readings available, since Aristotle had said diverse things on the subject. In *Politics* 7.7, for example, he (like Hippocrates) put forward a more climatological model of courage according to which the cold regions of Europe produce fortitude (and therefore comparatively free peoples), whereas those who live in the warmth of Asia are more fearful, and therefore "ruled and enslaved." Alonso de Cartagena, however, could not embrace such a climatological reading (*avant* Montesquieu) without calling into question crucial axioms of fifteenth-century Castilian aristocratic culture. On knowledge of Aristotle's politics in the fifteenth century, see Christoph Flüeler, *Rezeption und Interpretation der aristotelischen Política im späten Mittelalter*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam-Philadelphia: B. R. Grüner-J. Benjamins, 1992); and Anthony R. D. Pagden, "The diffusion of Aristotle's moral philosophy in Spain, ca. 1400-ca.1600", *Traditio* 31 (1975), 287-313.

Already in 1449 Fernán Díaz, the Relator of Juan II, had pointed out the dangers of such a 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.⁶⁸ Moreover, since the effects of genealogy were primarily expressed culturally, the religio-racial 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’ Chinese encyclopedia. The characteristics encoded in Jewish blood, according to the bishop of Cordoba in 1530, included heresy, apostasy, love of novelty and dissension, ambition, presumption, and hatred of peace. (Note the similarity with the list produced by Américo Castro.) 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 the son of the then Inquisitor General, Rodrigo Manrique, 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.”⁶⁹

It would be a mistake to see, in this attachment of “Jewishness” to culture, evidence that these late medieval discriminations were not “racial.” On the contrary, this “judaization” of Spanish culture was the direct result of the increasingly widespread use of ideas about the biological reproduction of somatic and behavioral traits in order to create and legitimate hierarchies and discriminations, within a society where extensive intermarriage (as well as strategic practices like the falsification of genealogies and proofs of purity of blood) made the reproductive segregation of “Judaism” impossible.

⁶⁸ For the Relator’s text see Alonso de Cartagena, *Defensorium unitatis christianae*, Appendix II, pp. 343–356, here pp. 351–355. Note that though the Relator condemns the anti-*converso* aspects of this genealogical approach, he (like Alonso de Cartagena, Juan de Torquemada, and other pro-*converso* writers) nevertheless utilizes genealogical arguments, referring constantly (for example) to the converts as of the lineage of Christ. On the Relator see *inter alia*, Nicholas Round, “Politics, Style and Group Attitudes in the *Instrucción del Relator*”, *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 46 (1969), 289–319.

⁶⁹ Henry de Vocht, “Rodrigo Manrique’s Letter to Vives”, in *Monumenta Humanistica Lovaniensia: Texts and Studies about Louvain Humanists in the First Half of the XVIth Century* (Louvain: Charles Uystpruyst, 1934), pp. 427–458, here p. 435: ‘Plane uerum est quod dicis inuidam atque superbam illam nostram patriam; adde, & barbaram. Nam iam pro certo habetur apud illos neminem bonarum literarum mediocritur excultum, quin heresibus, erroribus, Judaismis sit refertus’. See also Enrique González González, “Vives, un humanista judeoconverso en el exilio de Flandres” in Luc Dequeker and Werner Verbeke (eds.), *The Expulsion of the Jews and their Emigration to the Southern Low Countries* (15th–16th C.), (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998), pp. 35–81, here p. 77.

It would, however, be just as great an error to conclude that we have shown these discriminations, and the theories of cultural reproduction that underlay them, to be “racial.” All we have done is demonstrate the inadequacy of some influential arguments for dismissing the relevance of race to the pre-modern by finding in medieval Spain some of the attributes of race that various scholars have located in modernity (such as theories of selection in animal breeding, Foucault’s binary enmities, and of course the word “race” itself). From this we can conclude only that the vocabularies of difference and the natural histories available to the residents of the Iberian Peninsula in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries can be fruitfully compared to those of other times and places. We have barely begun the process of comparison itself. We have not explored, for example, the robustness of the binary opposition between “Christian” and “Jew” posited by the enemies of the *conversos*, or asked how the cultural work of such a binary within the state structures of the late Middle Ages differed from or was similar to the work Foucault had in mind in the Modern. We noted some broad similarities in the theoretical underpinnings of Toledo’s purity of blood statutes and the “racial anti-Semitism” of later periods, but we did not note how different the uses, applications, functions, and effects of these medieval theories were from those more modern ones. We have, in other words, only arrived at the most provisional and banal of conclusions: more work needs to be done.

This, it seems to me, is the most that can be expected of any history of race, and I would like to end by defending the humility of this conclusion. 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.⁷⁰ There may be some concepts whose histories are well described by such etymological and genealogical approaches.⁷¹ Here, however, we are concerned with the history of an idea – the conviction that culture is produced and reproduced in the same way as the species procreates itself – so venerable and widespread that Giambattista Vico elevated it to a universal in his *Principles of the New Science*. It is, moreover, an idea that has produced so heterogeneous a set of discourses and outcomes – even when limited to its most modern forms, such as “race” and “racism” – that these can scarcely be subsumed into a “concept” or a “theory.” The

⁷⁰ A tendency as well represented in fifteenth-century Castile as in other times and places: see, e.g., the “Inventario of Alfonso de Toledo”, BNP Ms., Esp. 204, fol. 1–105v.

⁷¹ Given Nietzsche and Foucault’s success in redefining the meaning of the term “genealogy,” it is important to note that here and throughout I am using the term “genealogical” in its traditional, non-Foucauldian sense.

history of this idea is not the history of a train of thought, whose wagons can be ordered by class and whose itinerary may be mapped across time and space, but that of a principle of locomotion so general that any account of its origins, applications, and transmission will always be constrained by our ignorance (or to put it more charitably, by what we recognize as significant). We cannot solve this difficulty by cutting (“race did not exist before modernity”), by stitching (“race has always already existed”) or by refusing to talk about what cannot be clearly defined (“races do not exist, and race does not have a history”).

None of this means that we should paralyse history with the cautions of a logician – “what is known as the history of concepts is really a history either of our knowledge of concepts or of the meaning of words” – only that we should keep such cautions in mind. 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 (or even to refuse the possibility of such an idea at all). Yet the choice can only be situational and polemical, in the sense that its recognition of significance springs from the needs and struggles (theological, political, philosophical, professional, etc.) of a specific moment. The polemics produced by such choices are invaluable when they stimulate us to comparison and self-consciousness. If, however, we treat them as anything but strategic, we simply exchange one lack of consciousness for another.

Race demands a history, both because it is a subject 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 provocative and limited; at worst a reproduction of racial logic itself, in the form of a genealogy of ideas.⁷² In either case, histories of race are

⁷² Thus, for example, many of the Spanish scholars mentioned in these pages came to the conclusion that, whatever “raza” might be, it originated with the Jews. Already in the nineteenth century Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, “founding-father” of Spanish historiography, wrote that “the fanaticism of blood and race ... we probably owe to the Jews.” The quote is from his letter to Valera, 17 October 1887, in Juan Valera, *Epistolario de Valera y Menéndez Pelayo*, (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1946), p. 408. See also Menéndez y Pelayo, *Historia de los heterodoxos Españoles*, vol. I, p. 410; vol. II, p. 381. Within the context of Spanish history, the opinion has been embraced by writers as diverse as Américo Castro and Claudio Sánchez Albornoz (see note 20, above). Conversely, an equally diverse group of Jewish scholars (which includes Yitzhak Baer, Cecil Roth, Haim Hillel Ben-Sason, Yosef Yerushalmi, Benzion Netanyahu, and Yosef Kaplan) has strenuously argued the opposite thesis, that these ideas were invented by gentiles (in this case Iberian Christians) as a way of denying converts from Judaism full membership in the Christian spiritual and social communities they sought to enter. Yosef Kaplan, “The Self-Definition of the Sephardic Jews of Western Europe and their Relation to the Alien and

best read by pre-modernist and modernist alike, not as prescriptive, but as polemical stimuli to comparison. We can each draw energy from the collision of such polemics with our own particles of history, and find new elements of both past and present 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 in the eleventh century 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.”⁷³ 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 pre-modernists (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 over-easy rejections 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

the Stranger”, in Benjamin R. Gampel (ed.), *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World, 1391–1648* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 128; Henry Méchoulan, “The Importance of Hispanicity in Jewish Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam”, in Bernard Cooperman (ed.), *In Iberia and Beyond: Hispanic Jews Between Cultures* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1998), pp. 353–372.

⁷³ “Sum autem est metaphora modum locutionis a proprietate sui quasi detorquere, detorquando quadammodo innovare, innovando quasi nuptiali amictu tegere, tegendo quasi praecio dignitatis vendere.” Mauro Inguanez and Henry M. Willard (eds.), *Alberici Casinensis Flores rhetorici* (Montecassino: Miscellanea Cassinese, 1938), p. 45. For a modern statement of a similar epistemology see FitzJohn Porter Poole, “Metaphors and Maps: Towards Comparison in the Anthropology of Religion,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 54 (1986), 411–457.

need not suggest that one followed from the other.⁷⁴ Admittedly the danger of such a fallacy is great, for the subject of race tends to bewitch its historians with the same philo-genetic fantasies and teleological visions that underwrite racial ideologies themselves. 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.

⁷⁴ As George Fredrickson implicitly suggests by beginning his *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002) with a treatment of “limpieza de sangre.”