

Lecture 5 - THE RISE OF EVOLUTION cont'd)

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(subhead) THE RECAPITULATION ARGUMENT

A few years ago the alleged proof from embryology was considered to be one of the strongest arguments for evolution. It was claimed that the embryo of every animal, including man, recapitulates the stages of evolution through which its ancestors were said to have passed in the rise from a single-celled animal through a fish stage, an amphibious stage, a reptile stage, and so on.

This argument was promoted with great vigor by Ernst Haeckel, who declared that it could be established as a law which he summarized in the catchy phrase, "Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny."

In recent years this so-called "biogenetic law" has come under great attack from biologists, many of whom declare that they no longer consider it a valid argument for evolution.

Every individual at one time consisted of a single cell. This cell divided and developed in both size and complexity until eventually a very complicated organism was ready for birth. The embryonic development is a very involved and extensive process. To take the fact that each individual goes through such a process as proof that all the many forms of life upon the earth have developed by descent with modification from one original type of one-celled creature is to make an unwarranted and illogical jump. In the early part of his existence every individual develops from what appears very simple to what is extremely complex, but this proves nothing about his ancestry or about the biological history of the earth.