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HUMAN "BRANCHIAL" WHATEVERS: PERPETUATING HAECKEL'S FORGERIES.

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Haeckel's biogenetic "law" (essentially, that ontogeny is a condensed recapitulation of phylogeny) is based on forged illustrations, or scientific fraud, as Haeckel himself admitted in a letter to the *Berliner Volkszeitung* on 29 December 1908. By 1973, accurate 3-D reconstructions of a series of young human embryos at the University of Göttingen had again proven that Haeckel's *idée fixe* is completely false, and that the developing human embryo does not pass through a gill-bearing stage. It is impossible to rescue the biogenetic law by subtle rewording, or by suggesting that it is only partially true. Nevertheless, textbooks in Anatomy, Embryology, and Molecular Biology still continue to describe structures in the human head and neck using the adjective *branchial* (i.e., of gills), and to reproduce the forged illustrations. Popularizations of human development perpetuate the myth for the general public. It will be argued that, if our comprehension of early human development is to make any progress, then we need to avoid defective terminology based on fraud. The arches that develop at the cranial end of the human embryo are simple biomechanical flexion folds - such folds occur throughout life at all flexion sites in the body. Since the identification of the "sixth arch" in the human is misconstrued, all attempts to search for derivatives of a "missing" fifth arch are futile. Similarly, claims for the existence of atavisms in the human embryo are false. Nowadays, it is instructive to re-examine how Haeckel dealt with his detractors, including Wilhelm His (senior).