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“The most important moment in the life of every man, as in that of all other complex animals, is the moment in which he begins his individual existence [coalescence of sperm cell and ovum] . . . . the existence of the personality, the independent individual, commences. This ontogenetic fact is supremely important, for the most far-reaching conclusions may be drawn from it. In the first place, we have a clear perception that man, like all the other complex animals, inherits all his personal characteristics, bodily and mental, from his parents ; and further, we come to the momentous conclusion that the new personality which arises thus can lay no claim to ‘immortality’ ” (p. 22).

Others beside Haeckel have held this kind of view at one time or another ; but, unlike him, most of them have recanted and seen the error of their ways. He is, indeed, aware that several of his great German contemporaries have been through this phase of thought and come out on the other side, notably the physiologist - philosopher Wundt, and he refers to them fairly and instructively thus :—

“What seems to me of special importance and value in Wundt’s work is that he ‘extends the law of the persistence of force for the first time to the psychic world.’