

Adventures in Human Being: A Grand Tour from the Cranium to the Calcaneum

By Gavin Francis

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"*Adventures in Human Being*, with its deft mix of the clinical and the lyrical, is a triumph of the eloquent brain and the compassionate heart."

--Wall Street Journal

We assume we know our bodies intimately, but for many of us they remain uncharted territory, an enigma of bone and muscle, neurons and synapses. How many of us understand the way seizures affect the brain, how the heart is connected to well-being, or the why the foot holds the key to our humanity? In *Adventures in Human Being*, award-winning author Gavin Francis leads readers on a journey into the hidden pathways of the human body, offering a guide to its inner workings and a celebration of its marvels.

Drawing on his experiences as a surgeon, ER specialist, and family physician, Francis blends stories from the clinic with episodes from medical history, philosophy, and literature to describe the body in sickness and in health, in life and in death. When assessing a young woman with paralysis of the face, Francis reflects on the age-old difficulty artists have had in capturing human expression. A veteran of the war in Iraq suffers a shoulder injury that Homer first described three millennia ago in the Iliad. And when a gardener pricks her finger on a dirty rose thorn, her case of bacterial blood poisoning brings to mind the comatose sleeping beauties in the fairy tales we learn as children.

At its heart, *Adventures in Human Being* is a meditation on what it means to be human. Poetic, eloquent, and profoundly perceptive, this book will transform the way you view your body.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Gavin Francis's engaging and edifying book *Adventures in Human Being* breathes life into the study of anatomy by situating it in the larger landscape of human experience, connecting the body to art, literature, music, astronomy, and history."
-New York Review of Books
"This sort of book has been done before but not nearly so well as Dr. Francis does it. He brings certain necessary equipment to this task. These include a keen sense of the marvelous, a prose style as elegant and cutting as a scalpel, and a breadth of clinical experience that is unusual in an age of specialization... *Adventures in Human Being*, with its deft mix of the clinical and the lyrical, is a triumph of the eloquent brain and the compassionate heart."
-Wall Street Journal

"Delightful... The joy of Mr Francis's work lies in the fact that although he delights in the body's physical reality, he takes care not to reduce human experience to that alone."
-The Economist

"A sober and beautiful book about the landscape of the human body: thought-provoking and eloquent."
-Hilary Mantel

"[A] brilliantly original and highly engaging book that takes you on a journey that is both familiar and unfamiliar, a book that marries both the physical and metaphysical with such imaginative wit and eloquence."
-The Independent (UK)

"[Francis] offers an unusually upbeat medical perspective...His essays form a kind of anatomical atlas in which Francis proceeds from head to toe, stopping along the way to explore the lungs, genitalia, liver, and other organs."
-Boston Globe

"Woven through [these] tales are brief but fascinating histories of society's evolving understanding of a given body part... And there are pictures-countless x-rays, paintings, and old medical illustrations... With so many threads, the essays might have risked becoming a tangled mess. But Francis handles them deftly, engaging readers and bringing us along with his own discursive thoughts wherever they take us."
-Health Affairs

"An illuminating and fascinating journey."
-Acadiana Lifestyle Magazine

"That *Adventures in Human Being* is an astonishing, moving and enchanting book can be explained in part by Francis's unique range of experience, his erudition and his enthusiasm."
-New Statesman

"[Francis] gracefully integrates elements of philosophy, medical history and literature to add a contemplative element to what is an already mesmerizing book. He writes from a medical perspective without being pretentious, and his simple yet highly descriptive prose beautifully communicates the science and drama bound up in the human form."
-BookTrib

"Francis jumps nimbly between anatomy, history and personal experience in a way that makes the book both highly informative and compulsively readable. You have only to glance at the index to see the range of this remarkable book... It promises an intriguing voyage and delivers it in great style. Thoroughly recommended."
-Daily Express (UK)

"So enthralling and so well written that it should win [a] clutch of prizes... immensely engaging and often unexpected... Some of the chapters are small masterpieces of insight and information."
-Sunday Times (UK)

"In a series of deft essays on anatomy, starting with the head and working down to the feet, Francis moves skillfully between the scientific and the aesthetic, anatomical fact and emotional consequence, to craft a profound yet highly readable account of the intimate, inextricable relationship between the physical body and what some still call the soul."
-Irish Times

"Clever, strangely beautiful... The style is crisp and fast and the human tales irresistible."
-The Times (UK)

"[Francis] is a fine, subtle and observant writer... this is an illuminating and arresting book."
-Herald Scotland

"A quietly radical, three-dimensional view of issues such as reproduction, birth, death and disability that has the power, at times, to make you stop mid-sentence and carefully reassess some of your most basic assumptions."
-Scotsman

"Since he is both a GP and a travel writer, a better-suited guide than Francis to this bag of flesh, fluids and bones would be hard to find. There is much to astonish in [his] travel through the 'most intimate landscape of all.'"
-Sunday Express (UK)

"An extraordinarily sensitive and informative book... Starting at the top of the body and going to the sometimes neglected bottom [Francis] thoughtfully and thoroughly discusses each bodily disturbance. His descriptions...are beautifully and clearly presented. Highly recommended."
-CHOICE

"[Francis] does a fine job of investigating the relationships among medicine, philosophy, and life in this informative and fascinating work. Appropriate for anyone interested in learning more about medicine, the history of medicine, philosophy, and human biology, from laypersons to researchers and scientists."

-Library Journal

"A joy to read and demonstrates that the best of medicine operates in the intersection between science and the humanities... thoroughly engaging."
-Publishers Weekly
"Doctors with literary ambitions write memoirs, tell stories about patients, or educate us. Scottish physician Francis successfully combines all three. In 18 chapters on 18 body parts, the author delivers no-nonsense lessons on anatomy and biology."
-Kirkus Reviews

"In Francis's beautifully written, exquisitely thoughtful, and completely captivating cartography, the body is a superbly-lit museum filled with treasures, and Dr. Francis the perfect guide who deftly weaves together science and story to reveal the wondrous flesh-and-blood underpinnings of our daily lives. It's a spellbinding view."
-Diane Ackerman, author of *The Zookeeper's Wife* and *The Human Age*

"*Adventures in Human Being* puts a new twist on armchair travel, bringing the destination right into the chair with the reader. Gavin Francis illustrates this tour of the human body with well-chosen and well-told stories from his own medical practice. A fascinating and thoroughly enjoyable read."
-Thor Hanson, author of *Feathers* and *The Triumph of Seeds*

"Wonderful, subtle, unpretentious... I have never read a book like this one and I recommend it wholeheartedly. Reading it, you feel better."
-John Berger, author of *Ways of Seeing*

About the Author
Gavin Francis is a physician and the author of *True North: Travels in Arctic Europe* and *Empire Antarctica: Ice, Silence and Emperor Penguins*, which won the Scottish Book of the Year Award, was shortlisted for the Ondaatje Prize and the Costa Prize, and was named a best book of the year by *The Economist* and the *Financial Times*. A regular contributor to the *London Review of Books*, the *Guardian*, and the *New York Review of Books*, Francis lives in Edinburgh, Scotland.

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Bradley Smith:

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Chris Boos:

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