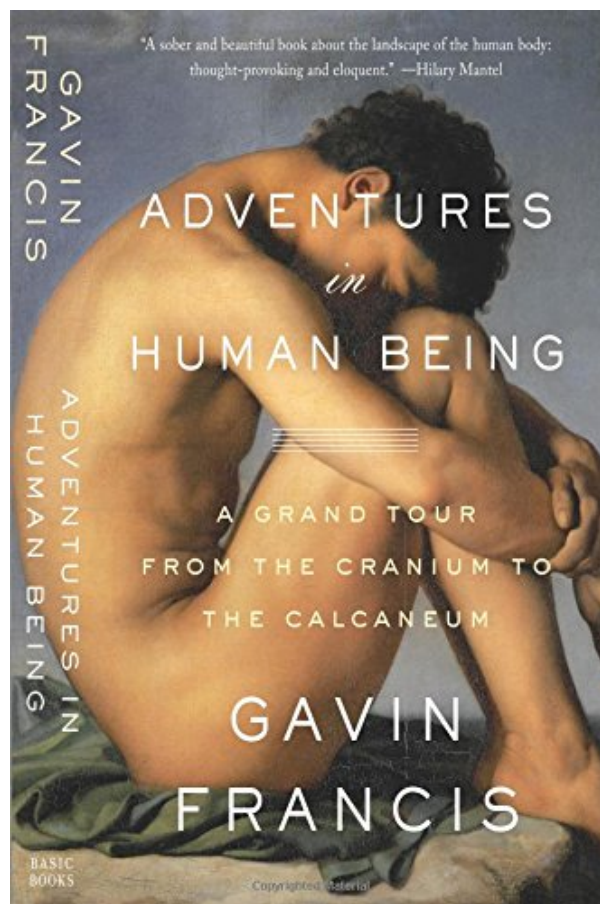
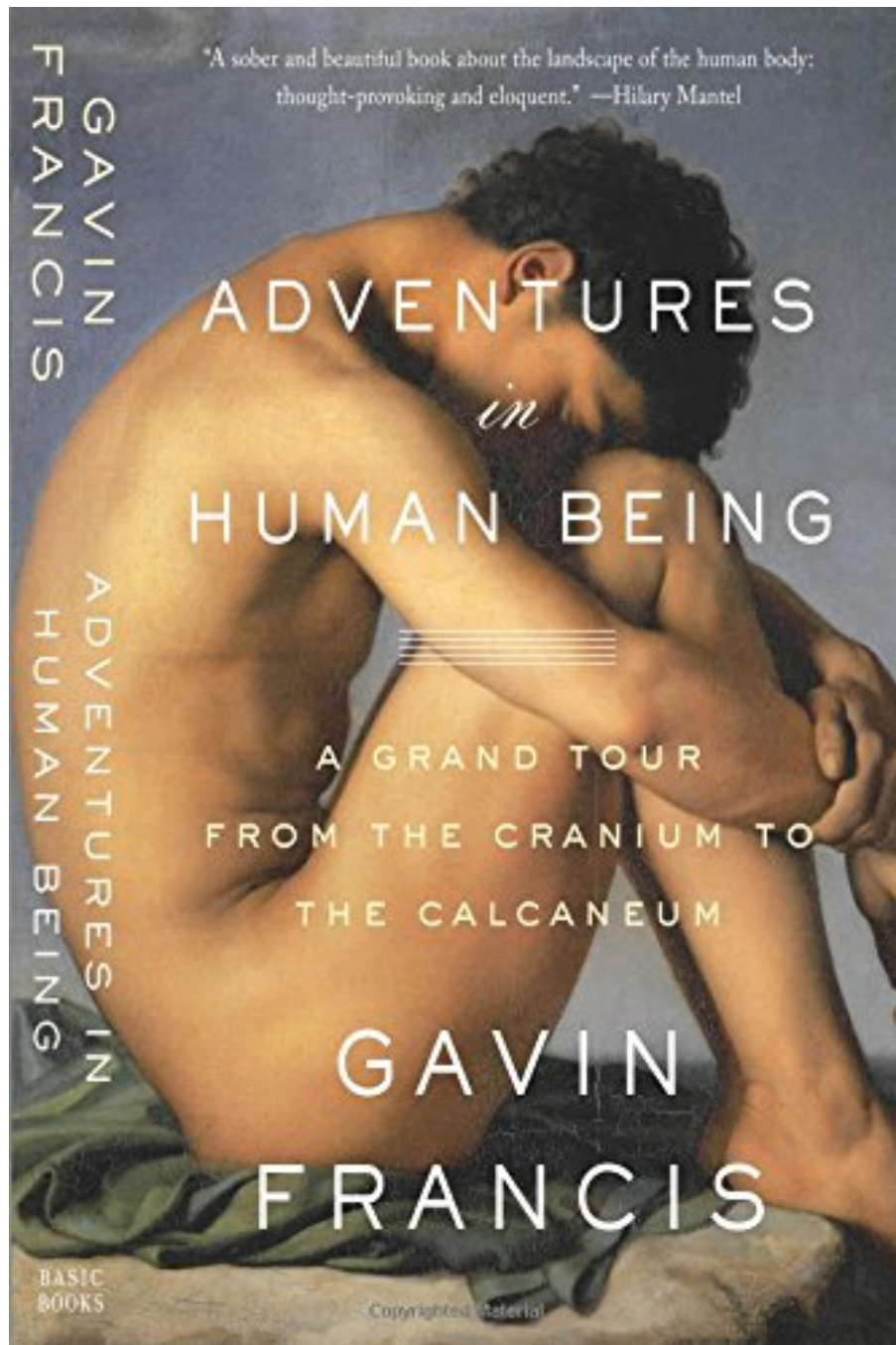


# ADVENTURES IN HUMAN BEING: A GRAND TOUR FROM THE CRANIUM TO THE CALCANEUM BY GAVIN FRANCIS



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## **PDF**

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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#### Most helpful customer reviews

56 of 60 people found the following review helpful.

The Good Doctor

By Joe McNally

I reviewed this book on Amazon's UK site. It's worth noting that the book, and my review, refer to the UK's National Health Service (the NHS), which makes many mistakes, but without it millions of lives in Britain would be seriously affected. For all its UK 'bias' (Dr. Francis lives and practices in Scotland, it is a book that will cross all boundaries and cultures, and I urge you to read it.

Medicine men...I never quite know what to make of those I meet. Last year, in the early hours of an April

morning, I sat alone against the rear wall and watched a young doctor sympathetically settle my wife into a bed in the intensive care unit. The ward was quiet. Away to my left was a small peacock of a man in glittering waistcoat that looked cut from a priest's vestments. I thought he was wearing spats, but as he approached, head up, better to see down his nose, I saw they were two tone, like golf shoes.

The young doctor was telling the nurse what medication my wife needed when the peacock, still ten strides away, called out 'No!' And he took over, without even acknowledging his young colleague. I later discovered that this peacock of a surgeon had told my sister to 'get yourself home and empty your bowels', when she presented with severe abdominal pain. Three days later he was cutting cancer from her bowel.

Then, as my wife's condition deteriorated, I was introduced to another surgeon, a man of humility and humanity, a man who did not patronise as he answered me straight:

'What's the prognosis for my wife, please?'

'The next 24 hours will be crucial'

'Worst case scenario?'

'We have had informal discussions of putting your wife on a ventilator.'

'What happens then?'

'...it is very difficult to come back from'

Since then, I've taken a much greater interest in the way the body works and the way the minds of those who choose medicine as a profession work. Gavin Francis's book not only taught me about the body, but it gave me back some sanity and balance in the judgement of others. The drama of saving lives, of making decisions, of being 'somebody', attracts the peacocks, but what a salve it is to find that it has an irresistible pull too for people like Gavin Francis. You will be in turns transfixed and enchanted by Dr Francis's gradual unclocking of the human body, not least by his skill in portraying without 'big words'.

You'll learn not only about the bone and blood and meat of which we're made, but of how others, long dead, saw it - the Greeks, the Romans, the philosophers, and the great writers. And all of it as seamless as the body itself. You are not jerked from place to place, but led smoothly along with the expertise of a born writer as well as a great doctor. You will watch with enchanted horror the rapid deterioration of a dark-haired young woman whose brush with a rose thorn brought her long lost mother to her intensive care bedside. And while the mother waits with her taped-eyed, tubed and wired unconscious child, Gavin Francis links her story beautifully with that of Snow White and the beliefs of older days.

John McEnroe's wife, the rock star, Patti Smith, finally discouraged him from trying to be a top guitarist by asking him, 'What are the chances of god giving you the talent to be the greatest tennis player in the world, and then adding some more to make you the greatest rock guitarist?'

Nobody could ask such a question of Dr Francis, a man blessed with the ability to be the finest of medicine men, alongside a sublime gift as a writer and a toucher of the human heart, in a manner way beyond the physical. I suspect the main wish of anyone finishing this book will be that Dr Francis would add them to his list patients.

I am off now to buy the other books of Gavin Francis. Happily, my wife will be able to read them too. After three weeks of lying with nine tubes sewn into her neck feeding her all the nutrients her body needed, her pancreas survived (well, all but the tail). That tail died. I suspect this tale, so wonderfully told by Gavin Francis, will outlive many of us.

21 of 21 people found the following review helpful.

Deeply human and wildly adventurous. Not to be missed.

By Aaron C. Brown

This is a wonderful series of anecdotes interspersed with some basic medical information--spiced with a bit of history and doctor's meditation--that adds up to considerably more than the sum of its parts. Rather than "Adventures in Being Human," I would call this book, "Adventures in Occupying a Human Body." The author skillfully describes the physiology, anatomy, biochemistry and neurology of the physical machine that is the body, but never loses sight of the person who occupies the same space. Starting from the top (the brain) and working down, organs and systems are described along with some of the reasons they can send you to the emergency room.

In the chapter "Wrist and Hand," we meet two people with "boxer's fracture," neither one admitting to throwing a punch. First is a pickpocket who claims he fell through a window, but in fact punched through a glass door attempting to control his rage and avoid hitting a woman. Second is a prison warder, whose story of a flying desk is belied by his prisoner in the next cubicle with a broken jaw. As the author gives a dispassionate clinical description of how the damage is repaired, he muses about the elegance and beauty of the tendons, muscles and bones that can drive a fist in horrific violence. There are no morals or silly romanticism, just medical expertise and informed appreciation.

One of the most moving stories is about Bill, a sensitive human dying of inoperable lung cancer. The airy beauty of the lungs, a thousand square feet of the most delicate imaginable fabric, contrasts with the "tumor burden" that creates heaviness and drags the human to the grave. Yet this story is never maudlin, the author is a sad realist, doing his best to give comfort, without "rage against the dying of the light." And through it all, his appreciation for the wonder of healthy lungs puts him in mind of wind, and leaves on trees; but also the ashes of cremated humans.

The book is fairly graphic in its descriptions of pain and suffering. The author never dwells on the subjects, but he does not use euphemisms or avoid mentioning the gore. Many cases involve seriously injured patients, or worse. I don't think this will bother most adult readers, but sensitive souls should be warned.

You can regard this as an entertaining way to learn about anatomy and medicine, or as a series of humorous and thoughtful essays about people. Either way, I recommend this book.

13 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

Better than Expected!

By Michele Vieux

This book is WAY different than I expected - it's NOT boring but I learned a ton! I like the approach to how it was written and the stories are great.

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