

Human Anatomy

For a long time, the knowledge of the human body structure in the medical profession referred to Galen's Theory. Galen was an imperial physician from the ancient Rome. He used the dissection of animals to infer the human body structure and hence, his theory was full of fallacy.

While Nicolaus Copernicus (1473 – 1543) created the “The Revolutions of Heavenly Sphere”, Andreas Vesalius (1514 – 1564) changed the old concept of how westerners viewed the human body structure.

From the 15th century to early 16th century, Belgium had a well-known medical family with three generations who had been servicing the royal family. In 1514, Vesalius was born into this family. Vesalius was influenced by his family and was determined to be a successful doctor. When he grew up, he went to the University of Paris to pursue medical studies in 1533. There, he studied Galen's Theory.

At that time, Galen's Theory was still considered as the standard even though it had been published for more than a thousand years. Vesalius started to become doubtful towards Galen's Theory and voiced out his new ideas and opinions about the human body structure, which was eventually opposed by the university.



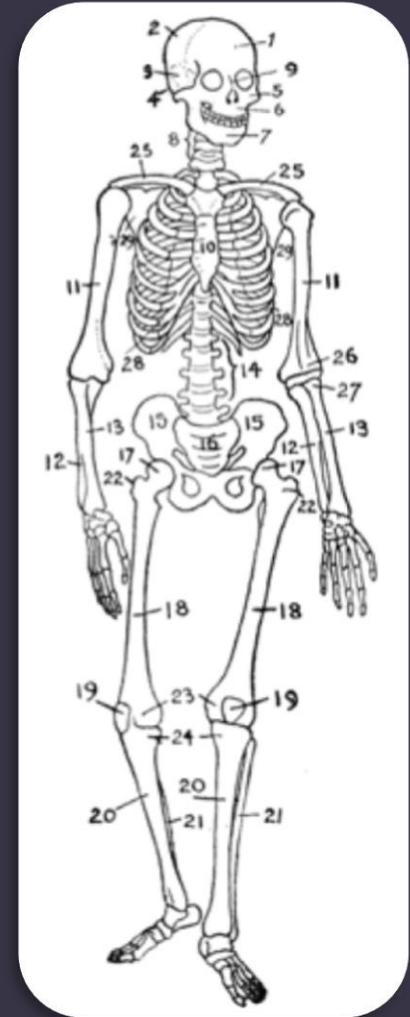
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Although a lot of old and misleading practices had already been buried in the tide of Renaissance, the medical education in the University of Paris had yet to completely break through medieval restraints. In addition to the stubbornness towards religious power from the Middle Ages which was still strong during that time, human dissection was regarded as offensive and obscene to the Gods. Therefore, people continued to follow Galen's Theory although the theory was found to be doubtful.

For all these reasons, Vesalius believed that the anatomy of the human body should be used to elucidate the human body structure so that the theory of anatomy can be made out of the dilemma of using animals to deduce the human body structure. Hence, he decided to take risks to find the ultimate answer.

In 1536, he had been stealing unclaimed corpses from the gallows in the city of Leuven, Belgium for dissection in order to study various parts of the human body. Although this action was deemed unacceptable in the present, this was the only access Vesalius had to the anatomy of the human body during the conservative medical environment back then.



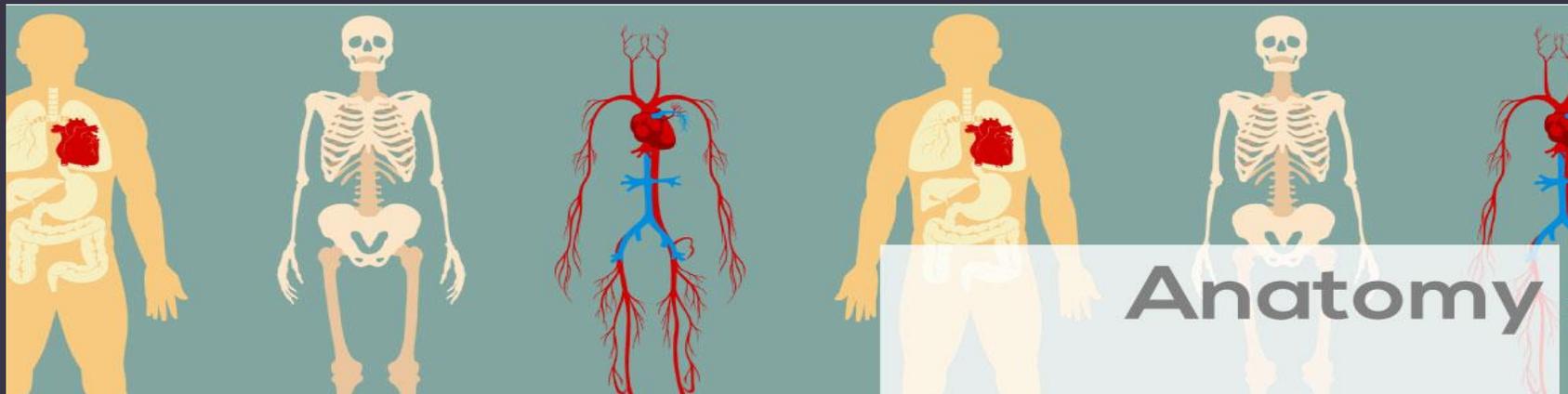
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Vesalius had learned and accumulated a lot of knowledge about the human body structure by dissecting unclaimed corpses, and hence, published the book “Abridgement of the Human Body” in 1543 when he was less than thirty years old. This book, which summarized the achievement of human anatomy, was considered monumental and even opened up the way for British scientist William Harvey (1578 – 1657) to discover the human circulatory system.

Food for Thought:

- To achieve innovation, inventors should challenge the old thinking and make necessary rectifications, and not stick to conservative rules.
- Inventors should learn from the persistent and adventurous spirit of Vesalius.



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