

# On the Motion of the Heart and Blood in Animals



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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

William Harvey, whose epoch-making treatise announcing and demonstrating the ejaculation of the blood is here printed, was born at Folkestone, Kent, England, April 1, 1578. He was educated at the King's School, Canterbury, and at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge; and studied medicine on the Continent, receiving the degree of M.D. from the University of Padua. He took the same degree later at both the English universities. After his return to England he became Fellow of the College of Physicians, physician to St. Bartholomew's Hospital, and Lumleian lecturer at the College of Physicians. It was in this last capacity that he delivered, in 1616, the lectures in which he first gave public notice of his theories on the circulation of the blood. The notes of these lectures are still preserved in the British Museum.

In 1618 Harvey was appointed physician extraordinary to James I, and he remained in close professional relations to the royal family until the close of the Civil War, being present at the battle of Edgehill. By mandate of Charles I, he was, for a short time, Warden of Merton College, Oxford (1645-6), and, when he was too infirm to undertake the duties, he was offered the Presidency of the College of Physicians. He died on June 3, 1657.

Harvey's famous "Exercitatio Anatomica de Motu Cordis et Sanguinis in Animalibus" was published in Latin at Frankfort in 1628. The discovery was received with great interest, and in his own country was accepted at once; on the Continent it won favor more slowly. Before his death, however, the soundness of his views was acknowledged by the medical profession throughout Europe, and "it remains to this day the greatest of the discoveries of physiology, and its whole honor belongs to Harvey."

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## DEDICATION

TO HIS VERY DEAR FRIEND, DOCTOR ARGENT, THE EXCELLENT AND ACCOMPLISHED PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS, AND TO OTHER LEARNED PHYSICIANS, HIS MOST ESTEEMED COLLEAGUES.

I have already and repeatedly presented you, my learned friends, with my new views of the motion and function of the heart, in my anatomical lectures; but having now for more than nine years confirmed these views by multiplied demonstrations in your presence, illustrated them by arguments, and freed them from the objections of the most learned and skilful anatomists, I at length yield to the requests, I might say entreaties, of many, and here present them for general consideration in this treatise.

Were not the work indeed presented through you, my learned friends, I should scarce hope that it could come out scatheless and complete; for you have in general been the faithful witnesses of almost all the instances from which I have either collected the truth or confuted error. You have seen my dissections, and at my demonstrations of all that I maintain to be objects of sense, you have been accustomed to stand by and bear me out with your testimony. And as this book alone declares the blood to course and revolve by a new route, very different from the ancient and beaten pathway trodden for so many ages, and illustrated by such a host of learned and distinguished men, I was greatly afraid lest I might be charged with presumption did I lay my work before the public at home, or send it beyond seas for impression, unless I had first proposed the subject to you, had confirmed its conclusions by ocular demonstrations in your presence, had replied to your doubts and objections, and secured the assent and support of our distinguished President. For I was most intimately persuaded, that if I could make good my proposition before you and our College, illustrious by its numerous body of learned individuals, I had less to fear from others. I even ventured to hope that I should have the comfort of finding all that you granted me in your sheer love of truth, conceded by others who were philosophers like yourselves. True philosophers, who are only eager for truth and knowledge, never regard themselves as already so thoroughly informed, but that they welcome further information from whomsoever and from wheresoever it may come; nor are they so narrow-minded as to imagine any of the arts or sciences transmitted to us by the ancients, in such a state of forwardness or completeness, that nothing is left for the ingenuity and industry of others. On the contrary, very many maintain that all we know is still infinitely less than all that still remains unknown; nor do philosophers pin their faith to others'

precepts in such wise that they lose their liberty, and cease to give credence to the conclusions of their proper senses. Neither do they swear such fealty to their mistress Antiquity, that they openly, and in sight of all, deny and desert their friend Truth. But even as they see that the credulous and vain are disposed at the first blush to accept and believe everything that is proposed to them, so do they observe that the dull and unintellectual are indisposed to see what lies before their eyes, and even deny the light of the noonday sun. They teach us in our course of philosophy to sedulously avoid the fables of the poets and the fancies of the vulgar, as the false conclusions of the sceptics. And then the studious and good and true, never suffer their minds to be warped by the passions of hatred and envy, which unfit men duly to weigh the arguments that are advanced in behalf of truth, or to appreciate the proposition that is even fairly demonstrated. Neither do they think it unworthy of them to change their opinion if truth and undoubted demonstration require them to do so. They do not esteem it discreditable to desert error, though sanctioned by the highest antiquity, for they know full well that to err, to be deceived, is human; that many things are discovered by accident and that many may be learned indifferently from any quarter, by an old man from a youth, by a person of understanding from one of inferior capacity.

My dear colleagues, I had no purpose to swell this treatise into a large volume by quoting the names and writings of anatomists, or to make a parade of the strength of my memory, the extent of my reading, and the amount of my pains; because I profess both to learn and to teach anatomy, not from books but from dissections; not from the positions of philosophers but from the fabric of nature; and then because I do not think it right or proper to strive to take from the ancients any honor that is their due, nor yet to dispute with the moderns, and enter into controversy with those who have excelled in anatomy and been my teachers. I would not charge with wilful falsehood any one who was sincerely anxious for truth, nor lay it to any one's door as a crime that he had fallen into error. I avow myself the partisan of truth alone; and I can indeed say that I have used all my endeavours, bestowed all my pains on an attempt to produce something that should be agreeable to the good, profitable to the learned, and useful to letters.

Farewell, most worthy Doctors, And think kindly of your Anatomist,  
WILLIAM HARVEY.

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## INTRODUCTION

As we are about to discuss the motion, action, and use of the heart and arteries, it is imperative on us first to state what has been thought of these things by others in their writings, and what has been held by the vulgar and by tradition, in order that what is true may be confirmed, and what is false set right by dissection, multiplied experience, and accurate observation.

Almost all anatomists, physicians, and philosophers up to the present time have supposed, with Galen, that the object of the pulse was the same as that of respiration, and only differed in one particular, this being conceived to depend on the animal, the respiration on the vital faculty; the two, in all other respects, whether with reference to purpose or to motion, comporting themselves alike. Whence it is affirmed, as by Hieronymus Fabricius of Aquapendente, in his book on "Respiration," which has lately appeared, that as the pulsation of the heart and arteries does not suffice for the ventilation and refrigeration of the blood, therefore were the lungs fashioned to surround the heart. From this it appears that whatever has hitherto been said upon the systole and diastole, or on the motion of the heart and arteries, has been said with especial reference to the lungs.

But as the structure and movements of the heart differ from those of the lungs, and the motions of the arteries from those of the chest, so it seems likely that other ends and offices will thence arise, and that the pulsations and uses of the heart, likewise of the arteries, will differ in many respects from the heavings and uses of the chest and lungs. For did the arterial pulse and the respiration serve the same ends; did the arteries in their diastole take air into their cavities, as commonly stated, and in their systole emit fuliginous vapours by the same pores of the flesh and skin; and further, did they, in the time intermediate between the diastole and the systole, contain air, and at all times either air or spirits, or fuliginous vapours, what should then be said to Galen, who wrote a book on purpose to show that by nature the arteries contained blood, and nothing but blood, and consequently neither spirits nor air, as may readily be gathered from the experiments and reasonings contained in the same book? Now, if the arteries are filled in the diastole with air then taken into them (a larger quantity of air penetrating when the pulse is large and full), it must come to pass that if you plunge into a bath of water or of oil when the pulse is strong and full, it ought forthwith to become either smaller or much slower, since the circumambient bath will render it either difficult or impossible for the air to penetrate. In like manner, as all the arteries, those that are deep-seated as well as those that are superficial, are dilated at the same

instant and with the same rapidity, how is it possible that air should penetrate to the deeper parts as freely and quickly through the skin, flesh, and other structures, as through the cuticle alone? And how should the arteries of the foetus draw air into their cavities through the abdomen of the mother and the body of the womb? And how should seals, whales, dolphins, and other cetaceans, and fishes of every description, living in the depths of the sea, take in and emit air by the diastole and systole of their arteries through the infinite mass of water? For to say that they absorb the air that is present in the water, and emit their fumes into this medium, were to utter something like a figment. And if the arteries in their systole expel fuliginous vapours from their cavities through the pores of the flesh and skin, why not the spirits, which are said to be contained in those vessels, at the same time, since spirits are much more subtile than fuliginous vapours or smoke? And if the arteries take in and cast out air in the systole and diastole, like the lungs in the process of respiration, why do they not do the same thing when a wound is made in one of them, as in the operation of arteriotomy? When the windpipe is divided, it is sufficiently obvious that the air enters and returns through the wound by two opposite movements; but when an artery is divided, it is equally manifest that blood escapes in one continuous stream, and that no air either enters or issues. If the pulsations of the arteries fan and refrigerate the several parts of the body as the lungs do the heart, how comes it, as is commonly said, that the arteries carry the vital blood into the different parts, abundantly charged with vital spirits, which cherish the heat of these parts, sustain them when asleep, and recruit them when exhausted? How should it happen that, if you tie the arteries, immediately the parts not only become torpid, and frigid, and look pale, but at length cease even to be nourished? This, according to Galen, is because they are deprived of the heat which flowed through all parts from the heart, as its source; whence it would appear that the arteries rather carry warmth to the parts than serve for any fanning or refrigeration. Besides, how can their diastole draw spirits from the heart to warm the body and its parts, and means of cooling them from without? Still further, although some affirm that the lungs, arteries, and heart have all the same offices, they yet maintain that the heart is the workshop of the spirits, and that the arteries contain and transmit them; denying, however, in opposition to the opinion of Columbus, that the lungs can either make or contain spirits. They then assert, with Galen, against Erasistratus, that it is the blood, not spirits, which is contained in the arteries.

These opinions are seen to be so incongruous and mutually subversive, that every one of them is justly brought under suspicion. That it is blood and blood alone which is contained in the arteries is made manifest by the experiment of Galen, by arteriotomy, and by wounds; for from a

single divided artery, as Galen himself affirms in more than one place, the whole of the blood may be withdrawn in the course of half an hour or less. The experiment of Galen alluded to is this: "If you include a portion of an artery between two ligatures, and slit it open lengthwise you will find nothing but blood"; and thus he proves that the arteries contain only blood. And we too may be permitted to proceed by a like train of reasoning: if we find the same blood in the arteries as in the veins, after having tied them in the same way, as I have myself repeatedly ascertained, both in the dead body and in living animals, we may fairly conclude that the arteries contain the same blood as the veins, and nothing but the same blood. Some, whilst they attempt to lessen the difficulty, affirm that the blood is spirituous and arterious, and virtually concede that the office of the arteries is to carry blood from the heart into the whole of the body, and that they are therefore filled with blood; for spirituous blood is not the less blood on that account. And no one denies the blood as such, even the portion of it which flows in the veins, is imbued with spirits. But if that portion of it which is contained in the arteries be richer in spirits, it is still to be believed that these spirits are inseparable from the blood, like those in the veins; that the blood and spirits constitute one body (like whey and butter in milk, or heat in hot water), with which the arteries are charged, and for the distribution of which from the heart they are provided. This body is nothing else than blood. But if this blood be said to be drawn from the heart into the arteries by the diastole of these vessels, it is then assumed that the arteries by their distension are filled with blood, and not with the surrounding air, as heretofore; for if they be said also to become filled with air from the ambient atmosphere, how and when, I ask, can they receive blood from the heart? If it be answered: during the systole, I take it to be impossible: the arteries would then have to fill while they contracted, to fill, and yet not become distended. But if it be said: during diastole, they would then, and for two opposite purposes, be receiving both blood and air, and heat and cold, which is improbable. Further when it is affirmed that the diastole of the heart and arteries is simultaneous, and the systole of the two is also concurrent, there is another incongruity. For how can two bodies mutually connected, which are simultaneously distended, attract or draw anything from one another? or being simultaneously contracted, receive anything from each other? And then it seems impossible that one body can thus attract another body into itself, so as to become distended, seeing that to be distended is to be passive, unless, in the manner of a sponge, which has been previously compressed by an external force, it is returning to its natural state. But it is difficult to conceive that there can be anything of this kind in the arteries. The arteries dilate, because they are filled like bladders or leather bottles; they are not filled because they expand like bellows. This I think easy of