



Western Civilization from 1650 to the Present

Dr. Edrene S. McKay ■ (479) 855-6836 ■ Email: esm@cox-internet.com

TOPIC 2.3. PRIMARY SOURCES: THE HUMAN BODY

THE HUMAN BODY

Even as the Scientific Revolution brought new insights into the structure of the universe, it brought a deeper understanding of the body. One of the earliest contributions to this understanding came from the Renaissance physician, Andreas Vesalius, whose *The Fabric of the Human Body* (1543) included detailed anatomical diagrams. Consider, for example, Vesalius' depictions of the [muscles](#), [blood vessels](#), and [nervous system](#). Over eighty years later, the English physician, William Harvey, published the results of his observations of the circulatory system. Read the following sample of his discussion in [On the Motion of the Heart](#) (1628).

How do Vesalius' diagrams and Harvey's discussion exemplify the intellectual values of the Scientific Revolution?

Now look at [The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolas Tulp](#) (1632) by Rembrandt van Rijn.

How does the artist represent the process of anatomical study? What do you think is the artist's attitude toward that process? Do you think he shares Vesalius' and Harvey's interest in how the body functions and is structured?

Adapted from [Humanities in the Western Tradition](#) by Marvin Perry