

INTRODUCTION

The original title of the book is "Common Knowledge: Living in a Human Body." I chose this title because there are so many books written from the point of view of the expertise of the author. I have no problem with such books; I have read hundreds of them.

However, this project is of a different sort. The only expertise that I bring to this effort is derived from having lived in a human body for 75 years, an expertise shared with anyone who might read this essay. Another part of the background of these essays is my experiences of teaching anthropology to university students over a period of thirty-two years.

This book focuses on a core of ideas, as follows:

1. Although most conventional treatments of the human senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch) treat them equally, here we argue for the primacy of the sense of touch.
2. The sense of touch is the first to develop during the gestation period and haptic inputs are the first experiences of the developing human brain. The other senses appear at later times, and input from these is integrated into the haptic framework.
3. During the first few weeks of post-natal development, during which the other senses are now operating at full speed, the haptic inputs still overwhelmingly dominate the infant's world of experience.
4. In a different essay, I will argue that the evolutionary history of humans, during the approximately four million years that our ancestry has diverged from that of the great apes, is best understood by examining the developments based on the sense of touch. Not only the beginnings of technology, which are based on the growing competency of the human hand, and the corresponding changes in the cerebral cortex, but also changes having to do with other surfaces of the body, such as the evolutionary loss of hair over most of the body. And even before this time period, while our entire evolutionary history was playing out, the sense of touch played a vital role. The unicellular ancestor of all animals operated primarily by the sense of touch, and gradually acquired more specialized senses which "branched off" from tactile sensations.