Psyc 660 Outline
Mortal Rituals: Intro, Chapter 1
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Intro

Why did the plane crash?
- We’ll never know for sure
- Pilot may have miscalculated position
- Fairchild planes as a class had poor safety records – maybe bad instrumentation (although this particular plane was fairly new)

Bare facts of the event
- 45 passengers on board plane, most affiliated with Old Christians Rugby Club from Montevideo, Uruguay.
- Crashed in Andes, Oct. 13, 1972 on route from Montevideo to Santiago, Chile
- Rescued after 10 weeks stranded in mountains, 16 survivors
- Survivors engaged in anthropophagy in order to avoid starvation
- Book argues that ritual played a critical role in their survival

Chapter 1

What is our natural state?
- Rugby as a means of teaching selflessness, group solidarity.
- This “group first” attitude may be a reflection of a more evolutionary ancient sense of self
- “ancient ways” defined as attitudes, behaviors more common to our ancestral past, which may include: polygyny; retributinal justice, tribal conflict, etc.
- Modern societies often impose restrictions curtailing “ancient ways” such as monogamy, courts of law, central governments, etc.
- Ancient ways are not necessarily more “natural,” but when modern restrictions ease, we can often expect them to re-emerge.
- One “ancient way” that re-emerged as a result of the Andes plane crash was the need to deal with omnipresence of death
- Higher infant and juvenile mortality rates, plus increased adult death rates due accidents and disease suggest that the specter of death was far more prevalent for our ancestors than for us today
- Numa Turcatti and the capaciousness of death on the Mountain

The virtue of Rugby
- Rugby was originally popularized in Imperial England of 19th Century as a way of countering the perceived “feminization” of males.
- Selfless commitment to the group (team) is identified as rugby most important “ancient ways” lesson
- Rugby was seen by English schoolmasters as a means of constructing a “muscular Christianity” among Englishmen, whose “aristocratic gentleman” image was fading
- It taught virtues of: Hard work, sacrifice to the greater good, and self-discipline
- It aroused in player a more “ancient” sense of self
The ancient sense of self

- Hyper-individualism is a characteristic of the Modern West
- Evidence suggest a sense of self much more embedded within a group or tribal identity was the norm in our past
- Traditional African culture defines the “person” as relational entity, embedded within the communal life of the tribe, with roles and responsibilities ritually bestowed
- A similar theme can be seen in Ancient literature such as Odysseus depiction in the Odyssey.
- Widespread literacy may have been an important contributor to the individualization of the self, it “privatized” cognition

How did humans become so groupish? The evolution of cooperation

- Our closest relatives, chimpanzees are highly social, but live largely in competitive societies
- Group hunting is one example of potentially cooperative teamwork among chimpanzees; however, under close scrutiny it may be individual goals enacted collectively
- First element of teamwork: understanding another’s intention or goals. Chimps can do this
- Second element: role reversal – chimps fail on this
- Third element: motivation to work together. Children want to work with others; will try to get a partner to re-engage if partner has quite. Chimps do not.

Learning social norms

- An important reason why humans cooperate so effectively in group setting is because our behaviors are guided by group norms – morally significant rules of conduct
- Social norms appear to be unique to humans, chimps don’t have them
- Children acquire norms by observing closely the intentional acts of others
- By age three, kids are not just imitative normative behaviors, they are enforcing norms on others, indicating that they have internalized a “rule” about how people should behave
- Studies with the ultimatum game provide evidence that humans will follow norms even if it is personally costly, chimpanzees will not.
- Michael Tomasello provides an evolutionary scenario for the emergence of human cooperativeness: obligate cooperative foraging, self-domestication, and group competition (more on this later)

Self-interested cooperators

- Even though we are highly cooperative, we did not evolved to be indiscriminate cooperators, instead we are self-interested cooperators
- We guard against exploitation in cooperation (cheater-detection reasoning)
- Self-serving bias: natural over-estimation of our own contribution to group success
- Teamwork can be undermined by self-interested cooperators

Irish monks used rugby to quash the self-interested aspect of cooperation.