

# ANTH 151 ANTH 151x

## Tutorial Nine: Our Modern Ecological Niche

Is human inequality an inevitable by-product of living in larger and larger groups? Is ethnicity or race an inevitable result of living alongside alien groups of people? Some would argue that traits like hierarchy and division are 'human nature.' Are they, in fact, the products of the ways we live socially? If so, what are the implications for issues like social discord and justice?

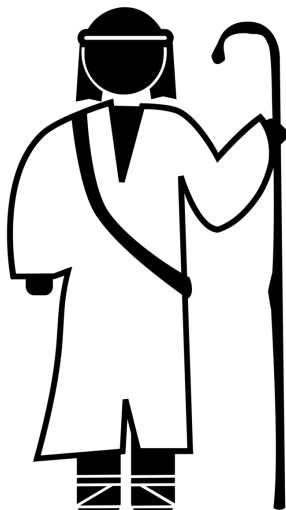
In what ways did Neolithic humans modify their environment?

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In what ways, then, would our ancestors have to adapt to the changes that they themselves induced? That is, how had niche creation placed new demands on human ancestors?



Some evolutionary theorists have argued that saying humans are responsible for agriculture may be comparable to saying that petri dishes developed penicillin. Why might this statement make sense?



Is the transformation of humans into agricultural societies inevitable? Irreversible?



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- How did the transition from nomadic hunters and gatherers to sedentary farmers differ in the Middle East and Americas?
- Arguably, the domestication of animals in Europe and Asia was more important to the success of Europe's colonisation of the Americas than even the invention of the sailing ship or gunpowder. Why?

### Questions for reflection:

- Why is the 'pristine myth' important to our understanding of the Americas, the fate of the Indians during European colonisation, and even environmental management?
- What are some of the unintended effects of agriculture and urbanization? Are they an inevitable consequence of these changes to human ways of life?
- What are the implications of this for our understanding of 'human nature'?

#### Key terms:

Niche creation  
Sedentary  
Agriculture  
Keystone species  
Commensal  
Domesticated animal  
Resource management  
Environmental alteration  
Irrigation  
Specialization

Surplus production  
Social hierarchy  
Anthropogenic  
Solitary genius  
Bands, chiefdoms and states  
Zoonotic disease  
Food production and infection  
Domestication of animals  
Pristine myth  
Terraforming  
Natufians  
'Black earth'