

The earth may have once been thought of as a well-loved mother—but she was also respected Human beings have always known that the same Earth that feeds us and gives us life can also turn deadly. The immense natural forces that first shaped our planet more than 4 billion years ago continue to be at work, both beneath the earth's crust and millions of miles out in space.

Today we have words that put things into categories—terms like natural world, supernatural world, manmade world, and we think of these categories as being made up of separate things. A forest, a spirit, and a city are three different realities in our mental maps. But earlier thinkers looked at reality differently. They had no mental divisions between what was natural, what was supernatural, and what was human, it was all one thing. These long-ago human beings didn't even have the words to describe such a concept. There was just Everything: a living, breathing universe. People lived in a world where Earth, spirits, and human endeavors were intertwined, interdependent, indivisible.

The people of Ethiopia and other African countries have been facing a series of natural disasters, droughts, that began in 1973 and show no sign of coming to an end. The drought of 1973 killed 300,000 people; the 1984 drought killed a million; and the cycle keeps occurring more and more frequently. African droughts once occurred regularly every ten to fifteen years, but now they are coming every three years, and the cycle may become even shorter. Some scientists blame El Nino, a periodic temperature increase in the Pacific Ocean, but others say that air pollution from Western countries is driving Africa's rain belt further south, allowing the Sahara's desert to encroach southward.

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