

# *Art thou a vain breath?*



Triumphal Procession (1513–1515) Ms. by Albrecht Altdorfer (detail)  
Graphische Sammlung der Albertina, Vienna

MYSTIC VERSE AND INSIGHTS SERIES  
ARE THOU A VAIN BREATH?

Plutarch, the priest of Apollo, when speaking of the oracular vapours which were but a subterranean gas, imbued with intoxicating magnetic properties, shows its nature to be dual, when he addresses it in these words:

And who art thou? without a God who creates and ripens thee; without a dæmon [spirit] who, acting under the orders of God, directs and governs thee; thou canst do nothing, thou art nothing but a vain breath.<sup>1</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> *Isis Unveiled*, I p. 200; [quoting des Mousseaux, *La Magie au XIX<sup>me</sup> siècle*, p. 224]