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ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

Ethereal Breath of the Gods: Always Circulating Aither



Humans breathe air. In contrast, the gods of ancient Greek mythology inspired *aither*, *aether*, or *ether*. Rather than the transparent gas inhaled by mortals, the deities breathed the blue gas found on mountain tops and in the heavens—all that lofty atmosphere above ground but beneath the solid dome of the Sky (*Ouranos*, Latinized as *Uranus*). Unlike earthly elements, which moved linearly, *Aither* circulated around heavenly bodies in circular orbits within ethereal spheres. In his *Cratylus*, Plato suggests that *aither* derives from *aei thein* (“always running”). *Aither* also serves as a backdrop for parts of Giulio Romano’s c.1533 *trompe l’oeil* frescoed ceiling in the *Chamber of the Giants* (a portion above), Palazzo del Te, Mantua, Italy. Volatile and intoxicating, our earthly anodyne, ether, may have seemed a gift from the gods. Alas, the only “blues” ether elicited in 19th-century mortals arose from recreational overindulgence. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists’ Wood Library-Museum of Anesthesiology. www.woodlibrarymuseum.org)

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