

## DEIFICATION IN CLASSICAL GREEK PHILOSOPHY AND THE BIBLE

To be human is to strive to be better, and we cannot be better without knowing what is best. In ancient Greek philosophy and the Bible, what is best is the divine. Plato and Aristotle argue that the goal of human life is to become as much like god as is humanly possible. Despite its obvious importance, this theme of assimilation to god has been neglected in Anglo-American scholarship. Classical Greek philosophy is best understood as a religious quest for divinity by means of rational discipline. By showing how Greek philosophy grows out of ancient Greek religion and how the philosophical quest for god compares to the biblical quest, we see Plato and Aristotle properly as major religious thinkers. In their shared quest for divine perfection, Greek philosophy and the Bible have enough in common to make their differences deeply illuminating.

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*For Mary Ann Beatty, beloved Latin teacher*

*Dine hunc ardorem mentibus addunt / Euryale, an sua cuique deus fit  
dira cupido?*

*Does a god fan the flames in the soul / Euryalus, or does a dire desire  
become for each of us a god?*

—P. Vergilius Maro, *Aeneid* IX, 184–185

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Who, in his skill confiding,  
Shall with rule and line  
Mark the border-land dividing  
Human and divine?  
—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Hermes Trismegistus*

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