

## 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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CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
 978-1-009-39296-9 — Deification in Classical Greek Philosophy and the Bible  
 James Bernard Murphy  
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CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,  
 a department of the University of Cambridge.

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 education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781009392969](http://www.cambridge.org/9781009392969)

DOI: 10.1017/9781009392945

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When citing this work, please include a reference to the DOI 10.1017/9781009392945

First published 2024

First paperback edition 2025

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data*

NAMES: Murphy, James Bernard, 1958- author.

TITLE: Deification in classical Greek philosophy and the Bible / James Bernard Murphy, Dartmouth  
 College, New Hampshire.

DESCRIPTION: 1. | Cambridge, United Kingdom : Cambridge University Press, 2024. | Includes  
 bibliographical references and index.

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2023056070 (print) | LCCN 2023056071 (ebook) | ISBN 9781009392921  
 (hardback) | ISBN 9781009392969 (paperback) | ISBN 9781009392945 (ebook)

SUBJECTS: LCSH: Philosophical anthropology. | Philosophy, Ancient. | Theological anthropology—  
 Biblical teaching. | Deification (Christianity)

CLASSIFICATION: LCC B187.M25 M87 2024 (print) | LCC B187.M25 (ebook) | DDC 128—dc23/eng/  
 20240305

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023056070>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023056071>

ISBN 978-1-009-39292-1 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-009-39296-9 Paperback

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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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