

This paper offers a new assessment of Capaneus' theomachy in Statius' *Thebaid* (10.827-939) through close attention to its gigantomachic associations. The importance, originality and elevated tone of the episode are explicitly signalled by the poet (827-31). I argue that the poem suggests at least three ways—ethical, philosophical, and political—in which we can evaluate the theomachy. However, despite the illumination they shed, these approaches ultimately fail to resolve the problem of evaluation.

When Jupiter likens Capaneus' theomachy to gigantomachy (909-10) the ethical implication is one of impiety and folly. The hero even calls himself a *superum contemptor* (9.550, cf. Mezentius at *Aeneid* 8.7 and Kronenberg). However, recent scholarship on the *Thebaid* has shown the extent to which the gods of the epic are morally compromised: Jupiter, in particular, resembles a tyrant. Proceeding from Feeney's critique of the Olympians, I show that Capaneus' theomachy is representative of a more nuanced conflict than the straightforwardly impious attack described by Vessey. This approach adds an ethical dimension to a movement begun by Lovatt and Leigh. Whether or not Capaneus' own motivations are to be applauded, the act itself tests the authority of a morally suspect Jupiter. I argue that gigantomachy does not function as a purely negative ethical paradigm, and that Jupiter's assimilation of Capaneus' theomachy to gigantomachy is not unassailable (the hero's wife, Evadne, rejects the comparison with the Giants at 12.553-57).

Philosophy also influences evaluation of the theomachy. Capaneus' use of Lucretian language (e.g., 3.659-61) associates his impiety with the Epicurean project, which Lucretius compared to gigantomachy at *DRN* 5.117-21 (commented upon by Taisne). However, that connection alone is insufficient to redeem Capaneus since it is unclear whether we are to see Capaneus as alluding to or parodying Epicureanism, and it is also unclear whether the *Thebaid* as a whole valorises the Epicurean / gigantomachic project. I argue that the equivocal relationship between philosophy and gigantomachy suggests multiple readings of the theomachy, but cannot adjudicate between them.

Finally, gigantomachy is a longstanding political metaphor in Latin epic (Hardie), and also in *Silvae* 5.3.195-97, where through it Statius describes the civil wars of 69 CE. Despite the consequent temptation to read Capaneus' theomachy as having specific political reference, such a reading is undermined by a lack of explicit mention of contemporary politics in the *Thebaid*. Recent work on Domitian (Jones, Southern) cautions us against the kind of negative assumptions about the emperor used in subversive readings of the *Thebaid* (Ahl, Dominik, Hill). I argue that the poem, far from encouraging a direct correlation of literary and historical figures, leaves the reader with little option but to read theomachy in abstract rather than specific political terms (cf. Malamud).

I have offered three ways of reading Capaneus' impiety that take seriously the gigantomachic associations. While each approach sheds some light on the theomachy, all three are unable independently to determine evaluation of the hero or his act, and they even destabilise any purchase won by another approach. This important episode thus requires the reader to engage a complex network of moral choices and implications, a procedure that I argue offers the best approach to the whole poem.