Gentrain dialogue (10/7/26) on *The Iliad*

Plato's *Laws*:
"Peace is just a name. The truth is that every city-state is, by natural law, engaged in a perpetual undeclared war with every other city-state."

Simone Weil, "*The Illiad*, or the Poem of Force" (1939):
"The true hero, the true subject, the center of the Iliad is force. Force employed by man, force that enslaves man, force before which man's flesh shrinks away. In this work, at all times, the human spirit is shown as modified by its relations with force, as swept away, blinded, by the very force it imagined it could handle, as deformed by the weight of the force it submits to. For those dreamers who considered that force, thanks to progress, would soon be a thing of the past, the Iliad could appear as an historical document; for others, whose powers of recognition are more acute and who perceive force, today as yesterday, as the very center of human history, the Iliad is the purest and the loveliest of mirrors" (1).

"Such is the nature of force. Its power of converting man into a thing is a double one, and in its application double-edged. To the same degree, though in different fashions, those who use it and those who endure it are turned to stone. This property of force achieves its maximum effectiveness during the clash of arms, in battle, when the tide of the day has turned, and everything is rushing towards a decision. It is not the planning man, the man of strategy, the man acting on the resolution taken, who wins or loses a battle; battles are fought and decided by men deprived of these faculties, men who have undergone a transformation" (26).

"The art of war is simply the art of producing such transformations, and its equipment, its processes, even the casualties it inflicts on the enemy, are only means directed towards this end–its true object is the warrior's soul. Yet these transformations are always a mystery; the gods are their authors, the gods who kindle men's imagination. But however caused, this petrifactive quality of force, twofold always, is essential to its nature; and a soul which has entered the province of force will not escape this except by miracle. Such miracles are rare and of brief duration" (27).

Bernard Knox, in the introduction to the Robert Fagles translation of *The Iliad* (--):
"But though we may have our [about the historical fact of the Trojan war], the Greeks of historic times who knew and loved Homer's poem had none. For them history began with a splendid Panhellenic expedition against an Eastern foe, led by kings and including contingents from all the more than one hundred and fifty places listed in the catalogue in Book 2. History began with a war. That was an appropriate beginning, for the Greek city-states, from their first appearance as organized communities until the loss of their political independence, were almost uninterruptedly at war with one another. The Greek polis, the city-state, was a community surrounded by

potential enemies, who could turn into actual belligerents at the first sign of aggression or weakness. The permanence of war is a theme echoed in Greek literature from Homer to Plato" (24).

"Everywhere in Homer's saga of the rage of Achilles and the battles before Troy we are made conscious at one and the same time of war's ugly brutality and what Yeatscalled its "terrible beauty." The Iliad accepts violence as a permanent factor in human life and accepts it without sentimentality, for it is just as sentimental to pretend that war does not have its monstrous ugliness as it is to deny that it has its own strange and fatal beauty, a power, which can call out in men resources of endurance, courage and self-sacrificethat peacetime, to our sorrow and loss, can rarely command. Three thousand years have not changed the human condition in this respect; we are still lovers and victims of the will to violence, and so long as we are, Homer will be read as its truest interpreter" (29).

Emily Wilson, Introduction from the *The Illiad* (2023):
"Epic poems describe the famous deeds of men (*klea andron*). But *The Illiad* is a strange kind of action story, in which feelings–fear, joy, lust, aggression, love, rage, sorrow–often seem to matter more than external behaviors. The first word in the Greek original, *menin* (from *menis*, 'wrath') denotes Achilles' deadly and superhuman rage: the term is usually applied to the anger of the gods. *The Illiad* ends with a different and fully human emotion: the desperate grief of mortal women over the death of Hector, the immanent fall of Troy, and the end of their freedom" (xxxviii-xxxix).

On *The Illiad*'s renewed popularity: "But over the past century, in the wake of two world wars and amid shifting attitudes towards masculinity and heroism, *The Illiad* has received renewed attention. Recent interpretations often view *The Illiad* as a poem less of glory than of mourning. [...] We are now in a period of crisis not for a specific nation but for humanity, inhabiting a planet that is becoming less and less habitable. A new kind of heartbreak can be felt in *The Iliad*'s representation of a city in its last days, of triumphs and defeats and struggles and speeches that take place in a city that will soon be burned to the ground, in a landscape that will soon be flooded by all the rivers, in a world where soon, no people will live at all, and there will be no more stories and no more names" (lix).