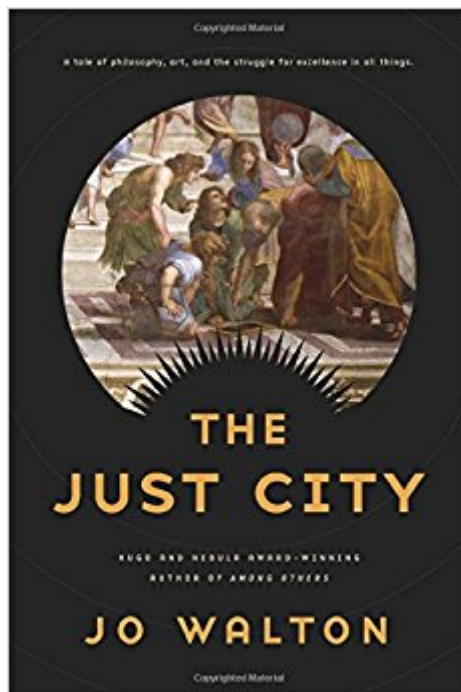


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# The Just City (Thessaly)



## Synopsis

"Here in the Just City you will become your best selves. You will learn and grow and strive to be excellent." Created as an experiment by the time-traveling goddess Pallas Athene, the Just City is a planned community, populated by over ten thousand children and a few hundred adult teachers from all eras of history, along with some handy robots from the far human future. All set down together on a Mediterranean island in the distant past. The student Simmea, born an Egyptian farmer's daughter sometime between 500 and 1000 A.D, is a brilliant child, eager for knowledge, ready to strive to be her best self. The teacher Maia was once Ethel, a young Victorian lady of much learning and few prospects, who prayed to Pallas Athene in an unguarded moment during a trip to Rome and, in an instant, found herself in the Just City with grey-eyed Athene standing unmistakably before her. Meanwhile, Apollo is stunned by the realization that there are things mortals understand better than he does. He has arranged to live a human life, and has come to the City as one of the children. He knows his true identity, and conceals it from his peers. For this lifetime, he is prone to all the troubles of being human. Then, a few years in, Sokrates arrives the same Sokrates recorded by Plato himself to ask all the troublesome questions you would expect. What happens next is a tale only the brilliant Jo Walton could tell.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A fast-moving yet thought-provoking novel." School Library Journal "Walton's

no-nonsense prose and dialogue are the kind of thing I can read anywhere, in any situation, and fall into a world of intelligent people speaking to each other intelligently in interesting ways...Brilliant, compelling, and frankly unputdownable." — NPR "An extraordinarily ambitious achievement." — The Globe and Mail

JO WALTON won the Hugo and Nebula Awards in 2012 for her novel *Among Others*. Before that, she won the John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer, and her novel *Tooth and Claw* won the World Fantasy Award in 2004. The novels of her Small Change sequence — *Farthing*, *Ha'penny*, and *Half a Crown* — have won acclaim ranging from national newspapers to the Romantic Times Critics' Choice Award. A native of Wales, she lives in Montreal.

Another home run by Jo Walton. I highly recommend the book, the following has some spoilers though many are contained in the book cover, if you don't like any spoilers this might be a good place to stop reading. The basic plot line is explained elsewhere, but Athena populates her city with 300 masters (generally philosophers thru history) who will serve as teachers for over 10,000 10 yr olds (bought in slave markets around the Med). As the cover mentions once someone is in the just city they can leave only by death or by being a god. Good discussion on slavery and robots who become sentient. We see the way views changed thru the centuries from the Masters. Also is Plato's Republic a good blueprint for a utopia (I think one is forced to concede no unless we really want to turn over everything to the elites—most of the children are assigned (condemned) as irons or manual labor. That is those children fortunate enough to make it past being exposed for not being good enough at birth. Socrates is rescued at death (unhappy also since he had already made his decision to drink hemlock) and has an interesting debate with Athena who eventually admits that she is not sure how the just city will work out and in will need to be enacted or tried out to see what happens kind of like Nancy Pelosi -- we have to pass it to see what it will be like. So I guess the gods are no better than our current flock of politicians. Anyway a lot of good thought in this book, and true to its Socratic roots, not so much answers as questions this book is well worth the read and I have already bought, though not read, the second one in the series

An interesting perspective on Plato's perfect republic: Athena, goddess of wisdom, gathers people from different times and places around the world on a secluded island, to help her with an experiment: build Plato's republic as it is described in the famous writing. We witness the birth of the actual city through the eyes of Apollo (who is living as a normal child, having given up his immortality

for this life), Simmea, an ugly brilliant slave girl and Maya, a Victorian scholar who gets a shot at her dream life, free of the harsh reality of being a woman in her time. The reality of actually building Plato's republic, the questions, the numbers, the choices, the things unsaid, the discrepancies- all create a wonderful captivating story. And the arrival of Sokrates and his questioning even the robots - brilliantly done.

I devoured this book. The detail of life lived in the Just City is mesmerizing -- and quite accurate to Plato's own account of the Just City -- and Simmea's perspective in particular is wonderful, her thoughtfulness and honesty just shining through her every interaction in ways that create fascinating, difficult counterpoints to the characters with whom she interacts. Like a Socratic dialogue, "The Just City" lures you into narrative traps and seems to watch as you struggle with your own ethics in response to it. It shows you a group of very different people coming together to transform a philosophical thought experiment into reality, determining how far to follow the letter of Plato's laws, where to accommodate their spirit, and what to do when the robots they've borrowed from the future to do their grunt-work develop sentience. The plot of the "The Just City" is brilliant. The god Apollo is baffled by the fact that Daphne, a nymph he was pursuing, preferred to turn into a tree rather than have sex with him. He asks Athene to explain to him the truly astonishing fact that a woman wouldn't want to be his lover. Athene introduces him to the idea of consent, and in a bid to understand things like "volition" and "equal significance" he decides to become mortal. But when and where should he live out his mortal experiment? Athene suggests he try Plato's "Republic". It turns out that Athene is trying out an experiment of her own. Throughout time and space, whenever anyone prays to her for a chance to live in the Just City of Plato's "Republic", she scoops them up, and sets them to making it happen. At the edge of a dormant volcano destined to explode, utterly separate from any surrounding civilization, Athene gathers Neo-Platonists, Greek concubines, people from the Renaissance, the 19th century, the 20th and further into our own future: Anyone who read the "Republic" in the original Greek and prayed to Athene to go there will get that chance. Walton gives us three points of view: Simmea, one of the slave-children purchased and raised as a free citizen in the Just City; Maia, a Victorian-era woman who becomes one of the city's founders; and Apollo, who begins as a god but for most of the book is a child being raised in the Just City along with Simmea. Through them, we learn the history, progress and problems of the City, and the various ways in which those problems are addressed -- or aren't. Unputdownable story!

What a thought-provoking book! The Goddess Athena sets up a "utopia" based on Plato's Republic, but there are lots of things that Plato didn't take into account and maybe sound good in theory but not so much in practice. This is beautifully written and I loved seeing the characters evolve. I am looking forward to the next book in the series.

I never quite "loved" it, but it was consistently interesting and enjoyable. The writing was always good, but rarely stood out -- you never groan at poor structure or phrasing but also never re-read any sentence for its sheer beauty of language. I would give it 3 1/2 stars. Ms Walton does a fine job with the "what if?" aspects of the story -- if Athene were real, if she attempted to create Plato's Just City as an experiment, etc -- and the story is really the star of the book. She also does a good job presenting interesting and likable characters. The plot gradually grows more complex and enticing from the seemingly simple "what if" premise to something larger by the end of the book. I suppose one of the best testaments I can make is that, upon completion, I immediately pre-ordered the second book, out at the end of June and do look forward to it. An enjoyable read that is surprisingly light given the philosophical subject matter.

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