Notes on Quiz #6: Sparta and Athens

1. In Sparta, the helots were
   a. protective armor worn over the shin
   b. hereditary slaves of the Spartan state
   c. elected officials in charge of the blacksmiths
   d. a form of gastrointestinal disruption

The helots were state-owned serfs. In origin they were the conquered peoples of Laconia and neighboring Messenia, subdued early in Sparta's history and permanent "prisoners of war." Each helot family farm provided a fixed amount of food year-round for a Spartan warrior, freeing the Spartans from the distractions of managing land, laborers, and produce. The helot families retained for their own use anything beyond what was levied, which is why they are at least nominally considered serfs and not slaves. — The Spartan system was heavily dependent on the helots. Because they greatly outnumbered the Spartan citizenry, which was restricted to the warrior elite (the homoioi), the Spartans were constantly alert to the dangers of uprising among the helots and feared marching their armies too far from home. To reinforce their status as prisoners of war, young Spartans were required to literally hunt helots as part of their training. Helots were also paraded before the young warriors drunk and humiliated to train them to think of helots as an inferior class.

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2. The Athenian lawgiver Solon was able to take power and enact sweeping reforms because he was trusted by "both sides." Which sides was he talking about?
   a. Sparta and Athens
   b. rich and poor
   c. Greece and Persia
   d. mortal and divine

Solon had the trust of both aristocrats and the commoners and so was able to enact reforms that benefitted Athens as a whole. He weakened the power of local and family influence by making participation in Athenian politics dependent on wealth, not blood, creating new classes that cut across local and family loyalties in order to strengthen Athenian unity and the prosperity that would come from a stronger and more vibrant unified economy. He strengthened Athenian agricultural production and relieved the debt slavery crisis that was crippling the poor peasantry. He fought not for the poor against the rich (as with the tyrants), or vice versa, but for a stronger Athens.

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3. Sparta was known for all of the following EXCEPT:
   a. Military training of all boys from age 7 onward
   b. Fearless women who were trained as athletes
   c. An expectation that men remain fit and ready to fight through age 60
   d. Accumulation of great wealth through trade

Sparta was a poor city that focused all its efforts on war, not trade. All boys who survived the weeding out of the unfit as infants were removed to the barracks at age 7 to undergo a collective education by the state designed to train each succeeding generation in the all-importance of training to become invincible warriors. The education was built entirely around building the endurance and training necessary to live and fight as idealized hoplite warriors in harsh and unforgiving conditions. The shared experience, in small bands and larger groups that shared a mess and quarters, fostered loyalty, solidarity, and cooperativeness, but did not educate boys in arts, science, or anything else besides the skills necessary to become a Spartan warrior.

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4. Powerful groups in democratic Athens included all of the following EXCEPT:
    a. The well-born aristocrats on the fertile plain (eupatridai)
    b. The artisans and merchants on the coast (demiourgoi)
    c. The two kings and their royal families (basilei)
    d. The minor landholding farmers on the hillsides (agroikoi)

Athens had no kings. Its social structure was made up of many groups with competing interests.

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5. In *Clouds*, the character "Socrates" argues that the god Zeus is
    a. actually the god of rhetoric
    b. not real
    c. the only god
    d. his brother

"Socrates" venerates natural phenomena and human cleverness; as such he denigrates the gods. He says there's no such being as Zeus, since the things he's given credit for, such as rain and thunder, are the work of the Clouds.

Optional Extra Credit

EC. What do you think might be some potential disadvantages of radical democracy, as practiced in Athens?

One problem noted by those who favored the aristocracy is that the poorer classes were not educated (education was only available to the wealthy in the ancient world). — More generally, dangers faced by pure democracy include demagoguery (unscrupulous people gaining votes by telling people what they want to hear); division into faction, making consensus difficult to achieve; and tyranny of the majority, where interests of smaller groups of voters are locked out by the needs and wants of the majority.