

Notes on Quiz #7: Athens in the Classical Period

1. People who taught the skill of arguing a question from any or all positions, as part of the art of rhetoric, in classical Athens were called
 - a. homoioi
 - b. hypocausts
 - c. gnostics
 - d. sophists

Sophists taught the skill of arguing a question from any or all positions, as part of the art of rhetoric, in fifth-century Athens. Democracy in Athens created a market for this service, since effectively persuading other voters to your point of view was a valuable ability in a society where ordinary votes mattered. Critics charged that sophists taught the ability to argue a position regardless of truth or morality. — Unlike sophists, who taught a skill, philosophers as a group sought the spread and increase of knowledge and understanding, whether of the physical world or of human behavior. They tended to question received wisdom and superstition in order to develop more rational explanations. Those who taught philosophy, generally, were interested in teaching their students how to question things in order to discover truth; sophists, by contrast, taught their students how to give the most convincing answer regardless of its truth or value.

2. All of the following are true of barriers protecting the crucial road between Athens and its port, the Piraeus, EXCEPT:
 - a. They were built in the mid-5th century, during the Undeclared War
 - b. The walls had no military importance and were put up to keep traders from trespassing on nearby farms
 - c. They were constructed to prevent Athens from being besieged and cut off from supplies
 - d. They were known as “the Long Walls”

The Long Walls were built during the Undeclared War to prevent Athens from being besieged and cut from its port.

3. The philosophical debate over *nomos* vs. *physis* arises from the difficulty classical Athenians had in answering the question:
 - a. What is the source of morality and justice? How do we agree on what is right or wrong?
 - b. Do humans have free will, or is their behavior determined by forces beyond their control?
 - c. What happens after death? Is there rest, suffering, or nonexistence?
 - d. Is a Pop-Tart a sandwich?

As Athens sought to achieve an ideal society, it was forced to confront the ultimate philosophic question: what is the source of morality? Some noted morality varies from city to city and county to country and argued that morality is *nomos*, whatever is agreed on in any one time and place; this suggests that morality is relative, and that it can be changed to suit whatever it is needed to be. The moral relativism of the sophists and the rhetoric they taught embodies this idea. — Others rejected moral relativism and argued that right and justice are *physis*, permanent laws of nature and therefore universal and unchangeable: what is right is always right. The real Socrates, unlike the cartoon of him presented by Aristophanes in *Clouds*, rejected the sophists and sought universal truths.

4. All of the following are true of the Parthenon temple EXCEPT:
- a. It is situated on the Acropolis
 - b. It was a place for the entire Athenian populace to regularly gather together inside and worship Athena as a congregation
 - c. The Athenian treasury was kept in the back
 - d. It was named for, and meant to be the home of, Athena the Virgin (and her statue)

The Parthenon is a temple dedicated to Athena the Virgin, situated on the Acropolis. It was a sacred space, and so thought a safe place for keeping the Athenian treasury. As was true of ancient temples in general, it was not a place of popular gathering to worship, but a place kept for the private use of the goddess.

5. The agora was a place where
- a. merchants sold and traded goods
 - b. citizens gathered for social, political, and religious events
 - c. government buildings and meetings were located
 - d. all of the above

The agora is the beating heart of the polis. The agora is the main marketplace of a polis, used not only for trading at merchants' stalls but for gathering, posting of laws, and public speeches. It was where news was exchanged, and the focus of social, political, and judicial activities. It represented the "outdoors" nature of the public space, where men were expected to spend their time. — The agora was surrounded by government buildings and public meeting places, including the buildings that housed the council and the board of strategoi, as well as altars, shrines, statues, inscriptions, fountains, and trophies of war. There could also be found shops, booksellers, bankers' tables, wholesale merchants, schools, and other kinds of public social and commercial interaction.

Optional Extra Credit

EC. For today you read the rest of *Clouds*. What does Strepsiades do at the end? What reasons does he give for doing it?

Pheidippides beat up his father, a shocking twist in the story and symbolizing the way shifting morals were leading Athenians to attack the very traditions and customs that made Athens strong. Remorseful over his willingness to be taught moral relativism and impiety by the sophists, Strepsiades later burns down the Thinkery.