Ancient history is rarely invoked these days for the political instruction it may offer. In times past the words and deeds of statesmen like Pericles, Demosthenes, and Caesar reverberated in the minds of political leaders, and the triumphs and tragedies of Athens and Rome were thought to offer useful lessons to the modern ship of state. Such days are long gone, due in part to a more sophisticated conception of the historical discipline. A healthy skepticism about the capacity of any period of history to teach readily applicable “lessons” prevails, and rightly so. Professional historians, at least, avoid sentences beginning with the words “History proves . . .” and ending with some general (and usually decidedly unproven) proposition.

But another, less well-founded factor works against a practical appreciation of the ancient world: the widespread belief that the classical experience is simply no longer relevant. Modern nations with their grand scale, advanced technology, and complex problems seem to have moved beyond comparability with cities thousands of years old. Such an assumption may be true in some respects, but with regard to at least one important contemporary issue — the prospect of democracy by direct action, as opposed to representation — modern progress has rendered the history of ancient societies more relevant. The mass citizen meetings which characterized ancient democracies, once impossible to recreate due to the geographical expanse of modern nation-states, have

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* This paper is a revised version of a talk delivered at the Florida Conference of Historians in Jacksonville, Florida in March, 1997.
become feasible again through electronic means. An understanding of the extensive ancient experience with “direct democracy” is now essential, as never before, if we wish to consider adequately the strengths and weaknesses of such practices.

This paper explores some points of contact between ancient and modern approaches to direct citizen involvement in national decision-making. Proposals for enhancing such participation in today’s societies will be discussed in light of the largely positive experience of the ancients. In particular, longstanding assumptions about the supposed volatility and incompetence of direct popular rule (especially as found in Greece) will be controverted. No attempt is made to advocate the implementation of direct democracy generally or in any locale; the purpose, rather, is to sweep away some erroneous conceptions long used to discredit it. While this study takes into account the history of many states ancient and modern, for reasons of precision and clarity special attention will be paid to two of the most prominent examples, ancient Athens and the present-day United States.

Direct vs. Representative Democracy

Direct democracy signifies government by the people, with no intermediaries. Current pluralistic societies pride themselves on their supposedly democratic constitutions; the United States, for one, makes much of its “government of the people, by the people, for the people.” But the fact is that almost all modern democracies are representative, entrusting little to the average citizen: in nearly every Western country the people elect, for years at a time, a tiny, elite group to do the job of governing for them. Professional politicians make all the decisions, enact all the laws; the rest of the population merely sits back and watches, and every few years votes to elect the same or a different set of politicians to take care of everything for them.

This is not what democracy entailed originally. Our word comes from the ancient Greek term demokratia, meaning roughly “people-

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power.” Many Greek city-states (poleis) placed power directly in the hands of their constituents. In the sixth century B.C. a number of poleis began to administer their affairs by this means, and the practice expanded in scope and popularity over the next two centuries.\(^1\) While the basic institutions of demokratia were employed in many city-states of Greece’s Archaic and Classical eras, the system best-known to us is that used by the Athenians in the fifth and fourth centuries. In Athens as elsewhere almost all matters of public policy were hammered out in a popular assembly: several times a month ordinary citizens of all grades — whoever wished to join in — would meet in a public place, listen to speakers from their ranks make motions and debate issues, and vote directly to accept, reject, or amend the various proposals. The people's decisions became law on the spot. They would judge all matters of major importance to the state, be it a new grant of citizenship, a tax hike, an alliance, a foreign war. In addition to assemblies, Athens and other demokratiae employed popular jury courts, chose many office holders by lot (including members of a council to prepare agendas for the assembly), carefully scrutinized incoming and outgoing magistrates, and even used ostracism (the temporary expulsion from the city of individual politicians deemed by popular vote to be dangerous to the city). Such institutions also contributed to demokratiae; but the renowned assembly meetings were the backbone, and illustrate most clearly what is meant by direct democracy — that the people themselves determine the most significant matters of public policy.\(^2\)

This arrangement is a far cry from the representative systems generally used in modern states. Today, legislative power typically resides with a congress or parliament of elected representatives; a president or prime minister (who depends on performance in elections for his or her office) oversees government administration. Ordinary citizens rarely have any immediate role in deciding state policy. Their influence is indirect at best: politicians they dislike may be voted out of office after some years and many decisions made. Some of these representatives will keep an eye on polls when deliberating issues of controversy, and lobbying groups will do their best to induce the politicians to decide in their favor. But given that only these select few ever take part in crafting and

determining policy, it is merely in an attenuated, theoretical sense that power can be said to rest with "the people."

How can this be — do not Western nations proudly wrap themselves in the mantle of democracy? Part of the explanation lies in the fact that true demokratia — the sort of system practiced by the ancient Greeks — was a practical impossibility for the 18th-century pioneers of present-day pluralistic governments. For example, the American revolutionaries could never have organized a direct democracy on the Greek model: the American colonies' relatively huge size and population precluded regular assemblies of the whole citizen body. Supporters of the newly proposed Constitution of the United States turned the fact of true democracy's infeasibility into a virtue by arguing that representation offered a superior alternative anyway. A national government run by the people themselves, it was thought, would lead to turmoil, faction, and poor decision-making. (More on this line of thinking presently.)

In the late 1990s, however, the circumstances which necessitated representative systems of government for republics no longer pose a problem: now the technology exists to overcome the barriers of geography and population size and to turn substantial legislative power over to the people, as once was the norm in many Greek states.

**Greek Democracy: Success or Failure?**

But before looking at strategies for modern direct democracy, let us consider how the Greeks fared, generally speaking, under their demokratiai. It is a difficult question to address fairly, of course, as so many factors outside the realm of internal politics affect the progress and prosperity of any given political entity. Disregarding such niceties, however, aristocratic observers ancient and modern have eagerly decried rule by the people. The hostile tradition begins in classical times with conservatives such as the Old Oligarch, Thucydides, and Cicero, who favored elite-dominated government and wrote bitterly of what they considered to be abusive, unpredictable and uncontrollable rule of the masses.³ Since then, up until the 19th century or so, most com-

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³ E.g., Old Oligarch [Pseudo-Xenophon], *Constitution of the Athenians*; Thucydides, 2.65, 8.97.2; Cicero, *Pro Flacco, De Republica*. Among major authors, Plato, Aristotle, Polybius, and Plutarch were also hostile to classical forms of democracy.
mentators happily joined in the disparagement, typically preferring the examples of Sparta or Rome or Macedonian kings. Athens, the most well-known demokratia, received the brunt of the criticism.4

Yet most classical scholars today would surely agree that, all things considered, demokratia performed at least as well as contemporary oligarchies or monarchies. At the very least, there are no firm grounds for concluding the opposite. Many of the most powerful and successful Greek poleis, including Syracuse, Argos, and Rhodes, practiced democracy for long periods of time. Athens itself, the favorite whipping-boy of aristocratic critics, did particularly well. Though accused of instability, it actually suffered far less civil strife than most states did, retaining its democratic constitution for close to 200 years, with only two brief wartime interruptions. Athens also became a dominant city for most of the Classical period economically, culturally, and militarily, a record unmatched by any other state.5

Of course, over nearly 200 years the Athenian people did make some poor decisions — the Sicilian Expedition of 415 BC (a military disaster) and the infamous execution of Socrates come to mind — and the people were also ultimately responsible for some brutal actions, including the bloody destructions of Scione and Melos during the Peloponnesian War. But what nation has not either blundered or acted immorally over such a long period of time? Athens’ unusual power and prosperity would suggest that as a rule the governing populace did a perfectly good job of perceiving the state’s best interests; and Athenian war-tactics were, on average, no more cruel than those of other contemporary Greek poleis (for which the execution of adult males and the enslaving of women and children in captured towns was not extraordinary). Athens’ war crimes, in any case, paled in comparison to the slaughters instigated by more than one Greek tyrant or that famous philhellene and king, Alexander the Great, who obliterated the great city of Thebes for daring to oppose him.

Moreover, the United States’ representative democracy, with professional politicians at the helm, has not managed to avoid its own moral and political catastrophes or escape internal strife. It has presided over the annihilation of countless native peoples; and modern wartime strategies have included “strategic bombing” campaigns on cities located deep behind battle lines, with murderous results for civilian populations. Elected leaders have also brought the country costly miscalculations of policy and outcome, as exemplified by the move to Prohibition and entrance into the Vietnam War. And while the American political system, like the Athenian, stands out among contemporary states for its overall stability, its leaders could not prevent (and indeed helped bring on) a ruinous, savagely fought Civil War, which has no real parallel in Athenian history.

Clearly, no political system is free from the occasional unwise decision which leads to disaster; and democracies of whatever stripe (just like more autocratic regimes) will sometimes act in cold-blooded fashion if it suits their interests. Even the pacific, democratic Swiss are capable of callous behavior, if recent accusations about financial collaboration with Nazi Germany are to be believed. It is all the more difficult, then, to claim that direct popular rule in ancient Athens produced consistently poor or injurious decisions: the city’s astounding record of achievements and its embodiment of typical Greek moral standards will not permit such an argument.⁶

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⁶ The Athenian use of slavery and the denial of the franchise to women provide a further example. These institutions have, naturally enough, made the Athenian democracy a target for modern censure. Yet unless someone were to propose that the modern political apparatus be replaced entire with the ancient Athenian one (which no one has), such criticism is irrelevant. Athens practiced slavery because all of Greece did, and most of the rest of the ancient world as well (and Athens supposedly granted its slaves unusual freedom, Ps.-Xenophon, Constitution of the Athenian, 1.10-12); women as a class were excluded from politics because that seemed to be the order of things, as it has to most peoples of the world until very recent times. The universality of these sentiments did not, and do not, make them right, but merely indicate that they were not properties of ancient democracy per se or of particular democratic states. They were simply elements of the social terrain upon which demokratia had to operate.
Potential Techniques For Modern Direct Democracy

Confident, then, that demokratia was anything but a failure in the ancient world, we may proceed to a discussion of some of the most talked-about ways of adapting it to present circumstances. Any meaningful attempt to promote direct democracy would have to accomplish two things: 1) Create real participation in the decision-making process for a great majority of the voting populace, and 2) Do so without inviting fraud or manipulation of the results on an appreciable scale. A variety of measures which meet these criteria to a greater or lesser degree have been proposed or even implemented in some Western countries, and increasingly politicians, journalists, and others have shown a willingness to consider whether modern democracies might benefit from these ideas.

The practices of initiative and referendum, employed separately or as part of a single system, put specific legislative proposals to the vote of the general populace. Bills of great moment or controversy passed by a national legislative body — e.g., Congress, Parliament — could be ratified by the people through a referendum before becoming law. Additionally, original proposals, or initiatives, could be put to a national vote if a sufficient number of signatures is collected in support of the measures. This practice has the longest history and would involve the least amount of innovation to implement. The Swiss have an arrangement of initiative and referendum built into their federal government and have been regularly and successfully using it for over a century. Many states within the American federal system currently employ ballot initiatives or referenda, perhaps most famously in California, where recent votes to curb illegal immigration and affirmative action have garnered wide attention.

One can easily imagine how such votes might function nationally in the United States as well. In fact, Ross Perot, a prominent indepen-

dent candidate for the American presidency in 1992 and 1996, has already proposed the use of referenda whenever the U.S. Congress wants to raise taxes. Popular votes could just as easily be used to resolve other contentious issues facing the country as a whole, such as abortion rights, gun control laws, or matters of war and peace. Measures which qualify—as selected by Congress or determined by virtue of a large number of signatures—could be placed on the ballot on election days or anytime during the year for particularly urgent matters. The resulting decisions would have the same force as Congressional legislation. Like Greek demokratia, the people themselves would once again be the true arbiter of public policy. Unlike polis assembly meetings, however, large-scale initiatives and referenda, as traditionally conceived, would operate remotely and individually: there would be no means of personal participation in meetings, debate, or other exchanges as an integral part of the process.

Another oft-mentioned vehicle for potential direct democracy is the internet. Right now the vast computer network is being energetically exploited around the world as a source of political information: news services, political candidates and parties, advocacy groups, government agencies, and others have set up pages on the World Wide Web to alert the public or get their message across. Computer-literate citizens can consult these sites quickly and easily for all kinds of material on practically any issue. There are internet-based discussion groups for the exchange of ideas on a wide variety of subjects, and at least one web page exists which routinely polls its browsers on public issues. E-mail has taken its place alongside the telephone and the post as a means of delivering political messages as well as getting feedback from potential voters.

But as new and exciting as the internet extravaganza is in terms of information exchange, none of it has yet been used to exercise binding electoral control over government. Could it not, however, perhaps for ordinary elections or to settle specific issues of policy? It easily could, though some technical matters of encryption and voter authentication would need to be worked out. On such occasions people would access

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8 Commercial enterprises have led the way in setting up safe, reliable means of securely transmitting data back and forth over the internet. Such means could be adapted for public use fairly easily to ensure that votes could not be tampered with once sent and that each registered voter would be able to cast only one ballot.
a web site which has succinct descriptions of the voting alternatives, with links to fuller discussions and various position statements, partisan and otherwise. After browsing as much as he or she desires, the voter would input some kind of personal access code (or use another electronic means to verify identity and franchise) and then vote.

One advantage of using the internet would be convenience — polls indicate that many people would prefer to vote from home via computer rather than journey out to a polling place somewhere and stand in line. Moreover, the quick availability of relevant information — as much or as little as each voter wishes, all within the click of a button — would make for a more informed electorate, able to judge issues of substance. Unfortunately, even in the most advanced countries relatively few people currently have access to the internet; in the United States perhaps 25 million or so do, a large number, but still quite modest when compared to the total number of eligible voters. Until and unless access to computers and on-line services becomes nearly universal in a given citizen body, the internet can never become the primary medium for direct democracy. Only secondary uses, complementary to more broadly available methods of communication, are suitable at present, though the ultimate potential is obvious.

Another sensational yet more realistic option exists for bringing immediate voter participation into national government. In the 1992 Presidential campaign Ross Perot proposed holding periodic, nationwide “Electronic Town Halls.” Americans would tune in to a televised debate over an issue of national importance, and afterwards vote on it through their TV, telephone, or some other device. The technology certainly exists to develop such a system and make it work. All but a tiny percentage of voting adults in America already have access to a television and phone service; ensuring opportunities for the rest and de-

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9 J. A. Moran, “Internet May Have the Potential to Transform Democracy,” Hartford Courant [Connecticut], November 4, 1996.

10 Ibid. Users worldwide could be as many as 93 million now, though statistics about internet use are uncertain at best. For on-line studies and predictions, see these URLs: http://www.mids.org and http://www.anamorph.com/docs/stats/stats.html.

11 Neither Perot nor his organization has ever spelled out exactly how his ideas would be implemented, despite confusion in the press (and repeated inquiries by this author). A useful reconstruction is offered by Michael Kelly in “Perot’s Vision: Consensus by Computer,” The New York Times, June 6, 1992.
veloping a mechanism for registering votes would cost some money, but not much in national budgetary terms. Perot saw these Town Halls as advisory — they would serve essentially as high-profile polls designed to resolve political log-jams in Washington, D.C. After politicians in Congress saw how voters in their districts and around the country reacted, Perot reasoned, they would be able to agree on legislation.

But why stop here, one wonders. The politicians in Congress might or might not pass a bill reflecting the voters’ choice — unless such electronic referenda were made binding. After several days or weeks of preliminary media attention, people could tune in to a televised debate; all channels would be compelled to carry the signal, or not, depending on how much one wishes to encourage voter attention. Congress or the major political parties could provide the speakers. A lottery of some kind could even be used to select ordinary citizens who wished to give their opinions on the issue — it might enliven the proceedings if a “man on the street” or two got to participate, not just the slick professionals. When the debate ended, all viewers would cast their votes electronically, and the decision of the people would be binding. These fortified “Electronic Town Halls” would take decisive authority out of the hands of the middlemen and return it to those who have theoretically always possessed it even in modern democracies: the people themselves. Furthermore, some flavor of the immediacy and civic unity of demokratia’s assembly meetings would be returned to politics, if only virtually.

Objections, Old and New

Such ideas as these make many politicians and theorists very nervous. Would it be wise to turn final legislative authority over to ordinary citizens? For those used to representative systems it may sound like a radical, even dangerous step. But if we truly believe in the democratic values most of us celebrate at home and proclaim abroad, the logic of direct democracy seems inescapable. Nor is the concept so radical:

12 E.g., David Broder’s recent syndicated column that appeared August 16, 1997 in The Florida Times-Union. The author chides California’s use of popular initiatives for being “weird” and “dysfunctional”; at the end he thunders: “[T]here might be far fewer occasions for conflict if California ever learns to respect the wisdom of the founders that a republic — with legislative power vested in elected representatives — is preferable to any other form of government.” On the wisdom of the founders (at least as concerns democracy), see below.
many modern governments already practice it to one degree or another, most notably the Swiss, but also the Australians, the Italians, and an increasing number of states within the U.S.A. Moreover, a proper understanding of *demokratia*’s operation in Greece further encourages the belief that direct democracy can be a responsible and effective method of popular rule.

Let us now consider some of the arguments employed to discredit direct democracy, electronic or otherwise. First, one often hears in the United States that this is simply not the way things were meant to be done; that the Founding Fathers explicitly rejected democracy on the ancient model, preferring to filter popular authority through representatives. It was not just a matter of impracticality: the architects of the new American republic objected to the whole *idea* of the people themselves being put in control and occasionally pointed to the Greek democratic experience as something especially to avoid. Should we simply accept these judgments, according them special value because they come from the originators of a great and influential constitution? Some may wish to, but naturally one should not. Aside from the obvious need to evaluate arguments on their merit, not the reputation of their authors, the fact is that America’s Founding Fathers demonstrate a shallow knowledge of classical history and were victims of centuries of biased and ill-informed opinion about Greek democracy. Most of the educated class favored Roman history and historians over their Greek counterparts. The ancient authors often consulted about Greece, such as Plutarch, lived centuries after the flourishing of *demokratia*, were hostile to rule by “the masses,” and could be terribly unrealistic in portraying governments of earlier times.

Furthermore, much of the evidence which modern scholars now rely upon to reconstruct the political procedures of Athens or other democratic *poleis* simply had not yet been discovered in the revolutionary era. The best example is the *Constitution of the Athenians*, attributed to Aristotle or one of his students. This treatise was uncovered only in the late 19th century, yet it represents perhaps the single most important document for detailed information about the functioning of the Athe-

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nian democracy. Moreover, the subfields of archeology, epigraphy, and numismatics which have blossomed over the last hundred and fifty years or so have made irreplaceable contributions to our understanding of ancient history. None of this information was available to the revolutionary leaders. Given the progress that our discipline has made in the last two centuries, one can no longer accept at face value pronouncements about ancient democracies made by a Thomas Jefferson or James Madison — let alone accord their views special weight.

However unreliable the Founding Fathers’ knowledge of ancient democracy, their objections have been echoed frequently in later discussions and must be addressed. Most of the arguments boil down to the question of judgment. Can ordinary citizens be trusted to make wise decisions? Apparently not, according to many commentators. James Madison labeled ancient democracy “turbulent” and prone to “faction,” by which he meant minority or majority groupings would let their passions get the better of them and act selfishly or rashly. Critics worry that government is simply too complex for the man or woman in the street, that decisions require the special abilities of a political elite. Alexander Hamilton had faith that an upper class of merchants, for example, could better represent the views and interests of humbler mechanics and artisans than the mechanics and artisans themselves, who lacked the necessary “acquired endowments.” Similarly, Madison placed great emphasis on the “enlightened views and virtuous sentiments” he was sure would be possessed of elected representatives.\(^\text{14}\)

Let us contemplate some of the more prominent politicians active on the American political scene today to test these notions. One wonders how well Jesse Helms, or Edward Kennedy, or Dan Quayle exemplify “enlightened views and virtuous sentiments” or otherwise distinguish themselves. Even people sharing many of the opinions of these major political players would likely admit that their faculties and character hardly seem to justify such lofty description. And yet those who

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\(^{14}\) Quotations from Federalist #10 (Madison) and #35 (Hamilton). Echoes of these criticisms of direct democracy can be heard in earlier and later eras. Plato, a resolute political elitist, thought it absurd that the Athenians did not rely upon experts to craft government policy (Protagoras 319). Ross Perot’s 1992 call for Electronic Town Halls brought derision or fearful condemnation from a number of commentators (to the extent that it was heeded), including H. C. Donahue’s piece, “Ross Perot as Master of the Media” in The Christian Science Monitor, June 24, 1992.
assert that average citizens ought not decide major issues of policy in essence ascribe superior abilities to such politicians and their colleagues. Now one can imagine better and worse decision-makers than the three named here (just as one could think of friends, neighbors, and relatives who are more and less talented than they). A few public servants may display truly outstanding abilities and characters, though identification of who these are will vary widely according to whom one asks. The point is not that all Congressmen and candidates are fools (though some surely are), but merely that as a class they rarely display the kind of specialized genius that would justify having always to trust their policy judgments over one’s own — an inevitable consequence of representative democracy.

Consider an alternative relationship between leaders and led, based on the Athenian model. Athens also produced politicians of varying agendas, characters, and abilities. Themistocles, Cimon, Pericles, Cleon, Nicias, Alcibiades, and Demosthenes, to name a few of the most famous, all had their strengths and weaknesses. For example, Pericles, renowned for his vision and incorruptibility, dominated the political landscape for years on end but helped bring on a war that proved catastrophic for Athens. Alcibiades was clever, ambitious, and duplicitous; Nicias was prudent, trusted, and slow. A comparison between these men and modern politicians on the basis of wisdom or virtue or acuity would be a pointless and fruitless exercise; the real distinction between the groups is the role played by each. Our leaders, as elected representatives, govern for us; the Athenian ones offered only their advice at public assemblies. They would attempt to attract support for their programs by a skillful speech, an unblemished reputation, or an engaging personality, but ultimately they would have to step back and allow the citizens to make the final decision. The gathered populace could choose to follow the advice of a preeminent public speaker (typically the case), or override him and take a different path. In this way the strong leadership and political experience (though not always perfection of judgment) provided by a Pericles or a Demosthenes complemented rather than replaced the will of the people.

But perhaps, one might contend, the representative system is superior not because of the personal genius of individual legislators, but due to the modern legislative process of hearings, professional staff work, committee meetings, and floor debates. To a limited degree, perhaps,
this is true: countless matters of detail can be dispatched without fuss, and lengthy, intricate bills and regulations may be patiently fashioned. For this reason, none of the above-mentioned approaches to direct democracy recommends or necessitates the elimination of legislators. Full-time public servants (still distantly accountable to the voters through elections) can continue to settle the routine issues and work through the technical challenges of putting together complicated packages. At the same time the most fiercely contested bills or those of greatest popular concern, once formulated, can be put directly to the citizens. Given the boredom minor legislation and petty disputes between parties presently instills in the populace, there is little reason to believe that voters would want to tackle the details of governing anyway. The Athenians too relied on a representative council to carry out minor tasks and prepare business for the assembly, but even so could find themselves stuck in long meetings giving routine approval to measures worked through by the council.\(^{15}\) To this extent, then, the modern legislative process produces valuable benefits.

But regarding decisions on the big issues, seeing the elected representatives in action rarely inspires faith that the process somehow imbues them with elevated capabilities. In the U.S. Congress, for example, floor speeches are hollow shows: when C-Span cameras pan about the room, viewers see a mostly empty chamber — no ones listens or cares, and, given the level of debate, no one ought to. Hearings too have much more to do with members playing to the media, trying to get a sound byte on the evening news, than searching for truth. It is difficult to perceive how the system improves the deliberations.

The contrast with Greek democracy is striking. There, skillfully crafted speeches by opposing leaders in the citizen assembly were essential, serving to inform and persuade a ruling body, and made for high drama. The people listened, and were willing to be swayed by the arguments presented. Modern direct democracy could work similarly. A binding Electronic Town Hall, for example, could be accompanied by days or weeks of preliminary information and discussions, culminating in a nationwide televised debate just before the vote. Interest would be high, especially if such events were restricted to the most important

\(^{15}\) Hansen (supra n. 2), 125-50 for typical assembly procedures.
issues. Importantly, extrapolating from studies of participants in American state ballot initiatives, a fairly informed, thoughtful decision could be expected from most of the voters.16

Some fear, however, that minorities would suffer under direct democracy. In a famous 1992 referendum, voters approved a Colorado law very hostile to homosexual rights. Might various ethnic, religious, or other minorities be victimized if national popular votes were instituted? It is possible; and the potential for a populist tyranny of the majority worried James Madison, among others. But we must ask why this tyranny would result. Is it that we as ordinary citizens are just more prejudiced than the politicians we elect? This seems a dubious proposition, and one hard to demonstrate. Furthermore, regardless of our opinion of ourselves, in the American federal system the judicial arm of the government would continue its role as constitutional watchdog. That Colorado referendum was ultimately struck down by the courts;17 there is no reason why the Supreme Court would not be able to review national popular votes which violated the rights of minority groups.

This oversight would surely be a good thing. One of the few obvious failings of Greek democracy — from an American perspective, at least — was the absence of institutionalized protections for individual rights. Socrates was put to death on grounds of speech and religion; on occasion other intellectuals suffered for their beliefs as well.18 The Greeks thought it was enough to give full judicial and governing power to the people as a whole and did not worry about enumerating specific, inviolate personal freedoms. The modern independent judiciary safeguards these freedoms more effectively. Any system of direct popular decision-making would surely benefit from the Court's presence.

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Conclusion

This paper has not much discussed positive reasons for implementing direct democracy in modern nations. Such advocacy for "Full Democracy" (as some have called it) has been effectively enunciated elsewhere, and bases itself on such factors as the weakening influence of and justification for political parties, dramatically higher levels of general education and access to information, and the desirability of building a more active, responsible, and public-minded citizenship. Instead, an attempt has been made here to correct misperceptions about ancient and modern direct democracy and underscore the relevance of the classical past. Current technology has for the first time opened the possibility of bringing something like Greek *demokratia* to the large nation-states of the late 20th century. The drama of informed political debate combined with direct, decisive action by those who would be affected by the results can now be attained through electronic means. In order to decide properly whether to embark on such ventures, we must first jettison erroneous, antiquated assumptions about the incapacity of the average citizen, the superior character of elected representatives, and the poor performance of ancient *demokratiai* like Athens. Direct democracy, whatever its other attractions or faults, represents a viable, proven method of bringing government more forthrightly into the control of the governed.

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