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Civic Republicanism and Democratic Politics—Michael Sandel and Contemporary Theories of Political Community*

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Abstract

This article examines the relevance of Michael Sandel's republican project in contemporary society. I first sketch Sandel's original position, then his turning from communitarianism to civic republicanism. The focus will be on "formative politics" in the civic republican tradition. My contention is that Sandel's differentiation of republican political community from traditional communities is of vital importance as it provides grounds for distinguishing Sandel's idea of constitutive community from that of Charles Taylor, another notable communitarian-republican theorist. Sandel

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emphasizes the formative capacity of democratic practices, while Taylor advocates linguistic community as the ultimate constitutive community. This ontological difference leads to democratic republicanism in the case of Sandel and an uneasy vacillation between civic and cultural nationalism in the case of Taylor. The formative politics of democratic republicanism is interpreted and expanded by way of Bruce Ackerman's dualist democracy. This article concludes by considering the practical implications of democratic republicanism for Asian countries.

Key Words: Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor, Bruce Ackerman, Democracy, Republicanism