



IU BLOOMINGTON

# EMERGING AREAS OF RESEARCH

## Abstract Template -- Due June 30, 2017

Title of initiative to be proposed:

Comparative Ethics, Political Theory, and Political Philosophy

Name of lead PI, with title, department/school:

Aaron Stalnaker  
Associate Professor, Dept. of Religious Studies, College of Arts and Sciences

Key team member names and departments/schools (up to 10 names):

Hussein Banai, International Studies; Kate Abramson, Philosophy; Marcia Baron, Philosophy; Sandra Shapshay, Philosophy; Allen Wood, Philosophy; Aurelian Craiutu, Political Science; Russell Hanson, Political Science; Jeffrey Isaac, Political Science; William Scheuerman, Political Science; Michael Ing, Religious Studies; R. Kevin Jaques, Religious Studies; Winni Sullivan, Religious Studies

Description of area to be proposed. What constitutes this area of research or creative activity as emerging?  
(Word limit=500)

Western scholars who study ethics and political thought have over the last decade become increasingly fascinated by the intellectual implications of the current decentered global situation. Political theorists and ethicists realize they must engage writings on their subjects from outside Europe and the Anglo-American world more deeply, and in so doing see thinkers from other traditions and regions as philosophical interlocutors, and not merely as representatives of formerly subject peoples. By “comparative” ethics, political theory, and political philosophy we mean research in these disciplines that brings “mainstream” Western theorizing about ethics and political theory into explicit dialogue with philosophical and religious traditions and current debates from outside the European-influenced West. We aim to construct a “fusion of horizons” sufficient to enable productive philosophical debate about significant ethical and political issues, while explicitly raising the question of standards for judgment, argument, and relevance, in order to address deep differences without capitulating to either relativism or ignorant cultural chauvinism. We hope to shed fresh light on pressing normative issues regarding war, populism, global development and trade, liberalism and its discontents, and ethical universalism, as well as basic questions about the nature of norms, authority, solidarity, obligation, and virtue, among other topics. We are presently witnessing a dramatic upsurge in interdisciplinary attention to global and comparative normative theorizing in Political Science, Political Philosophy, and Religious Studies. This trend is visible in changing publishing patterns in flagship journals and elite university presses, as well as changing emphases in faculty hiring in these areas.

Luckily, Indiana University is perfectly positioned to seize a position of preeminence in these emerging fields. We already have strong faculty in political theory and ethics spread across Philosophy, Political Science, and Religious Studies, among other departments, and have two current faculty whose research centers on comparative ethics (Stalnaker) and political theory (Banai). IU’s strength in global and international studies, including cultural and historical studies and a wide range of language training, also gives us essential supporting infrastructure that many elite competitors in these fields lack (e.g., Princeton).

We propose to found the IU Center for Comparative Ethics, Political Theory, and Political Philosophy. This center would be anchored by present IU faculty, and augmented by three new faculty hires, one in each of the three departments. The center would encourage robust intellectual exchange and cohort formation at the graduate level across the three primary departments, to allow IU faculty to take a leading role in shaping this new approach to normative theorizing, and place a generation of IU PhDs in positions of academic leadership. It would also dovetail with IU Press’s new book series on World Philosophies. The EAR program would aid the work of interested faculty by supporting graduate students, post-docs, and visiting speakers and fellows; underwriting conferences and publishing projects; and providing a base and target for future grant writing. We think the proposed center would appeal strongly to outside foundations such as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Luce Foundation, and the Berggruen Institute.

Please submit to [earprogram@indiana.edu](mailto:earprogram@indiana.edu)