



## Standard Application form for students applying for a +2 or +3 studentship in the Arts and Humanities

(September 2023 entry)

### 1. Studentship applied for (please tick):

- 2 years FT/ 4 years PT funding (for those who have already started a PhD programme)
- 3 years FT/ 6 years PT funding

### 2. Named studentships you wish to be considered for (see guidance for details):

- Global Majority studentship
- Philosophy Pathway studentship for female Global Majority candidates
- Broken Pipeline studentship (UK only)

### 3. Candidate's details:

<b>Name:</b>	
<b>Application / Registration number:</b>	
<b>Address:</b>	
<b>Town:</b>	
<b>Postcode:</b>	
<b>Country:</b>	
<b>Telephone:</b>	
<b>Email address:</b>	

<b>Nationality/Resident Status:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> UK or Irish National <input type="checkbox"/> UK Settled status <input type="checkbox"/> EU National not resident in the UK <input type="checkbox"/> EU National resident in the UK for the past three years <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other
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#### 4. Project details:

**Mode of Attendance**     a. Full time             b. Part time

<b>Project title:</b>	Conceptualizing Individual Moral Obligation: A Case for Collectively Insignificant Outcomes
<b>Pathway:</b>	Philosophy
<b>Institution:</b>	The University of Manchester

#### 5. PhD Proposal:

5a) Please describe the proposed research (**up to 1500 words**). The word limit includes bibliography or references, tables, figures, table/figure captions and footnotes. Please include a word count.

1. INTRODUCTION: CONTEXTUALISATION AND MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION/PROBLEM TO BE ADDRESSED

In this thesis, I argue, contra Julia Nefsky, that the ‘problem of collective harm’ goes beyond a mistaken assumption to reveal a poor conceptualization of individual obligation to act in morally relevant ways, regardless of *collectively insignificant outcomes*. I aim to establish among other things, why the overriding principle for collectively insignificant actions can best be motivated by individual moral obligation – hereafter ‘IMO’ – conceptualized as a ‘non-collective fundamental duty’ necessary for the common good.

There are various accounts of collective harm cases (Parfit 1984; Nefsky 2017, 2019, 2012a, 2012b; Kutz 2000; Cripps 2011), as well as collective and individual–obligation/responsibility cases (Held 1970; Collins and de Haan 2021; Collins 2017, 2020). Nefsky (2017: 2744) articulates an insightful case of collectively insignificant actions as ‘the problem of collective harm’ and the cases of collectively insignificant actions as “collective impact cases.” According to Nefsky (2019: 1), ‘collective harm’ arises in cases where “when enough people act in a certain sort of way serious harm results, and yet no individual act of the relevant sort seems to itself make a difference.” The issue in collective harm cases captures “the risk of our together bringing about avoidable harm” (Nefsky 2019: 10) by taking a morally harmful course of action or refusing to act in a morally relevant way because of the belief that collectively, our singular good acts will make no difference. This, in some way, absolves our singular harmful actions of moral responsibility as we have no ‘morally relevant reason’ to act otherwise. This view can also be referred to as the *no-effect view* (see Sinnott-Armstrong 2005).

Nefsky thinks this way of thinking about the problem is mistaken. For Nefsky (2019: 10), our singular actions “[b]eing too small to change the outcome by itself does not mean being unable to make a non-superfluous move toward a different outcome.” Consequently, Nefsky takes a position that affirms the relevance of singular acts in bringing about an outcome, even if it fails to make a difference collectively.

However, what is wrong with this way of thinking about collective harm cases? Is there a reason for acting in a morally relevant way as individuals, regardless of collectively insignificant outcomes? If yes, what is the best justification for acting anyway? Is there anything wrong with consciously acting in a way that contributes to a morally harmful outcome? Also, if we do our part to contribute to collective harm, then what makes doing our part to contribute to a collective solution morally insignificant? Most importantly and central to this research, what is the place of IMO in collective impact cases? Can IMO provide a better motivation or grounding for collectively insignificant outcomes? This research will attempt to engage and provide defensible answers to these relevant questions.

The problem of this research is as follows: firstly, collective impact cases, in their current conceptualization, often lead to the exoneration of individuals from moral responsibility, even whilst acknowledging the role of individual actions as constituting part of the causal factors in undesirable or desirable outcomes. It ignores the role of intrinsic harm and common benefit which trickles down to the individual. Secondly, besides excusing certain harmful actions, like driving a gas-guzzling car that contributes to climate change, it justifies a way of life that is detrimental to the common good, like selfishness and consistent self-interest. From the African philosophical perspective which I intend to base my defense of IMO, consistent self-interest of this nature is anti-self-interest (see Asouzu 2007, 2004). This means that such actions, in the end, are not just detrimental to society but also to the individual.

An extant body of literature on collective impact cases has failed to conceptualize IMO in a way that motivates individual responsibility for acting in a morally relevant way. The few discussions found in the works of scholars like Parfit, Held, Nefsky, Collins, Sinnott-Armstrong, and Hiller, to mention but six, focus mostly on the general question of obligation/non-obligation as secondary motivations for acting in a morally relevant way. They fail to frame moral responsibility as a 'non-collective fundamental duty' necessary for the common good. The latter aspect which yearns for attention will constitute the primary focus of this research.

Despite the overall long-term relevant role that individual obligation can play in transforming the moral landscape, I believe that the problem of collective impact has not received adequate attention in the contemporary philosophical literature. This yearning for more engagement on the potential implications of acting regardless provides adequate justification and highlights the significance of this research.

## 2. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

The first methodology that will guide this research is that of textual analysis and interpretation, which is a common approach adopted by researchers in the humanities. Thus, extant relevant literature in the form of textbooks and journal articles that are related to collective impact cases and moral obligations that constitute the primary focus of this research will be consulted and adequately engaged. The method of critical analysis will be used to explicate and critically analyze extant literature on collective harm cases for analytical clarity and possible criticisms. The third method that will guide this research is the conversational method. The latter will be employed to show how IMO can be motivated to address the problem of individual contributions to collective harm. As a philosophical method, "conversationalism is a formal procedure for assessing the relationships of opposed variables, in which thoughts are shuffled through disjunctive and conjunctive modes to constantly recreate fresh thesis and anti-thesis each time at a higher level of discourse, without the expectation of the synthesis" (Chimakonam 2017: 121). The conversational method will be applied to establish how IMO is better motivated when collective harm is understood from the framework of individual obligation to the common good.

## 3. EXPECTATION OF ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

This research is expected to make the following contributions to knowledge in the areas of collective impact cases and moral responsibility: Firstly, an original contribution to the debate on how to tackle collective impact cases primarily from the perspective of individual obligation. Secondly, individual moral responsibility for the common good is an underexplored approach in the context of collective impact cases. My employment of this approach will make two significant contributions: (1) Providing clarity on the potential of IMO as a viable approach to overcoming the problem of the motivation to act, regardless of collectively insignificant outcomes; and (2) Establishing how IMO as an approach can inspire positive actions for the common good, for example, in the context of climate change.

Furthermore, to the best of my knowledge, this research will present the first systematic articulation of IMO as an approach to overcoming the limitations of acting in collective impact cases. In attempting to conceptualize IMO, this research will not just contribute to existing debates and approaches to collective impact cases, but will also contribute by opening up new vistas for discourses on moral thinking about collective impact cases.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Asouzu, I. I. 2007. *IBUARU: The Heavy Burden of Philosophy Beyond African Philosophy*. Zurich: LIT VERLAG GimbH& Co. KG Wien.

\_\_\_\_\_. 2004. *The Method and Principles of Complementary Reflection in and Beyond African Philosophy*. Calabar: University of Calabar Press.

Chimakonam, J. O. 2017. What Is Conversational Philosophy? A Prescription of a New Theory and Method of Philosophising, in and Beyond African Philosophy. *Phronimon*, vol. 18, pp. 114-130. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17159/2413-3086/2874>.

Collins, S. and De Haan, N. 2021. Interconnected Blameworthiness. *The Monist*, vol. 104, no. 2, pp. 195–209. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/monist/onaa032>.

Collins, S. 2020. How Much Can We Ask of Collective Agents? *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 50, no. 7, pp. 815-831. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/can.2020.42>.

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Cripps, E. 2011. Climate change, collective harm and legitimate coercion. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 171–193.

Held, V. 1970. Can a Random Collection of Individuals Be Morally Responsible? *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 67, no. 14, pp. 471-481.

Kutz, C. 2000. *Complicity: Ethics and Law for a Collective Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nefsky, J. 2012a. Consequentialism and the Problem of Collective Harm: A Reply to Kagan. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, vol. 39, no. 4, pp. 364-395.

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\_\_\_\_\_. 2017. How you can help, without making a difference. *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, vol. 174, no. 11, pp. 2743–2767. DOI: 10.1007/s11098-016-0808-y.

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Parfit, D. 1984. *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sinnott-Armstrong, W. 2005. It's Not My Fault: Global Warming and Individual Moral Obligations. In *Perspectives on Climate Change: Science, Economics, Politics, Ethics, Advances in the Economics of Environmental Research*, vol. 5. Edited by Walter Sinnott-Armstrong & Richard B. Howarth. Amsterdam: Elsevier, pp. 293-315.

**Word Count:** 1491

5b) Please provide information on how the proposed research engages with issues relating to Equality, Diversity, Inclusion, and Sustainability (max 100 words)

Climate change has disproportionate negative impacts on low-income countries and communities that contribute least to the problem. However, the perspectives of those communities are missing in many of the debates. This work will bring the perspective of African philosophy to bear on the debates on individual moral obligations related to climate change and other similar problems where individual action to collective harm appears to be insignificant. Furthermore, this research will foster epistemological inclusion and promote sustainability through its call for a non-collective approach to motivating action for current global challenges like climate change.

## 6. Qualifications, professional/ practical experience

Year awarded	Qualification type	Qualification Subject	Awarding institution	Class or GPA
2023	Master of Arts	Philosophy	University of Pretoria	Pending
2022	Bachelor of Arts Honours	Philosophy	University of Pretoria	Distinction
2017	Bachelor of Arts (Honours)	Philosophy	University of Calabar	First Class



<p><b>Description of professional/practical experience (max 350 words):</b></p>	<p>I am a research enthusiast (Former Graduate Teaching Assistant and member of the elite Conversational Society of Philosophy (CSP)) with over three years of combined experience working in the academic environment. As a citizen of a developing country, in recent years, I have witnessed a growing sense of moral resignation by individuals to act in morally relevant ways because of the general feeling that their singular positive acts cannot make a difference, collectively. Some scholars – Julia Nefsky, Anne Schwenkenbecher, and Walter Sinnott-Armstrong – call this problem ‘the inefficacy problem’. This and related moral and political questions are what I intend to find solutions to in the course of my Ph.D. research.</p> <p>Driven by the above interest, in my first year as a master’s student, I have recorded immense academic success with the following publications:</p> <p>██████████. 2022. ‘The Paradox of Ambivalent Human Interest in Innocent Asouzu’s Complementary Ethics: A Critical Inquiry’. <i>Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions</i>, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 89–108. DOI: <a href="https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ft.v11i2.7">https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ft.v11i2.7</a>.</p> <p>██████████. 2022. ‘Review of Consolationism and Comparative African Philosophy: Beyond Universalism and Particularism, by Ada Agada’. <i>International Journal of African Renaissance Studies - Multi-, Inter- and Transdisciplinarity</i>, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 226-230. DOI: <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/18186874.2022.2105734">https://doi.org/10.1080/18186874.2022.2105734</a>.</p> <p>My interest in Individual Moral Obligation as an approach to motivating action inspired my paper, “Individual Moral Obligation: An Approach to Sustainability” which I was invited to present at the Boston University Philosophy Graduate Student Conference on Sustainability and Environmental Ethics, in 2022 (<a href="https://www.bu.edu/philo/events/graduate-student-philosophy-conference/">https://www.bu.edu/philo/events/graduate-student-philosophy-conference/</a>). My paper was one of the 7 papers selected on merit and originality for the 7 presentation spots available for the conference. In January 2023, I presented my theory of Conversational Ethics to the Philosophical Society of Southern Africa at its Annual Conference, held at the University of Johannesburg. Most recently, I won a full grant to participate in the São Paulo School of Advanced Science on “Contemporary Logic, Rationality, and Information”, held at the University of Campinas, São Paulo, from February 6–17, 2023. I have also refereed for <i>Filosofia Theoretica</i> and the <i>South African Journal of Philosophy</i>.</p>
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## 7. Supervision

Please propose the supervisory team for your project:



Institution	Supervisor
The University of Manchester	
The University of Manchester	

### 8. Research Training and resource needs (max 150 words for this section)

Please give details of the anticipated research training needed for your PhD project, including difficult language training. Please give details of the kind of resources you will potentially need during your PhD. Please also indicate whether your research project will require you to undertake research abroad.

None.

### 9. Collaboration with External Partners (max 150 words for this section)

Please give details of any potential collaboration you will develop with external organisations during your PhD programme (industry, cultural organisation, government bodies etc) including possible placements.

I will be collaborating with environmental organizations like Friends of the Earth International, the Climate Justice Charter Movement in South Africa, and Navdanaya in India. I will possibly like to take up a placement position in any of these organizations to broaden the depth of my philosophical understanding and analysis of the challenges they face in motivating both individual and collective responsibility for environmental sustainability. The insights gained from this collaboration will positively impact the quality of my research on collectively insignificant outcomes.

### 10. References / Transcripts

Your institution will need to attach two references and your transcript(s) from your programme application to this application form.

### 11. Acknowledgement

I confirm that the information I have provided in this form is complete and accurate to the best of my knowledge at this date. I fully understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that the relevant forms are submitted to the relevant office in due time and that any missing information may render my application incomplete and ineligible. I authorise the North West Consortium DTP to disclose to the AHRC any information that is relevant to my application.

<b>Signature:</b>  (Type Name if submitted electronically)	
<b>Date:</b>	February 2, 2023

