If you are interested in obtaining a doctor’s degree (Ph.D.) under my supervision, there are a couple of things you need to know before you get in touch with me. This might save both you and me a lot of time, confusion and serious disappointment.

**The system**

In the Dutch PhD system, there are three types of PhD candidates: those holding a salaried three (new system) or four (old system) year position as a PhD Researcher at a university; bursaries financed by a university for three or four years, and everyone else – to whom we usually refer as ‘external candidates’ (buitenpromovendi).

If you are interested in salaried positions for PhD researchers, you should consult [http://www.ru.nl/newstaff/working_at_radboud/job_opportunities/](http://www.ru.nl/newstaff/working_at_radboud/job_opportunities/).

In general, there are no grants available for students (foreign or domestic) wishing to pursue a PhD at my university (the Radboud University Nijmegen). However, Nuffic, the Netherlands organisation for international cooperation in higher education [www.nuffic.nl](http://www.nuffic.nl), offers several scholarships, e.g. The Netherlands Fellowship Programme (NFP). For more information about application and selection procedures, please look at: [www.nuffic.nl/nfp](http://www.nuffic.nl/nfp). Additional information can also be found at: [www.nuffic.nl/home/docs/publications/phd-programme.pdf](http://www.nuffic.nl/home/docs/publications/phd-programme.pdf). On [www.grantfinder.nl](http://www.grantfinder.nl) you can find all the available scholarships in the Netherlands.

**The external candidate**

Let us then continue on the following assumption: either you will have to finance your research on your own or, if you are not from the Netherlands, perhaps you have a small grant to support part of your work. This would make you an external PhD candidate. Becoming an external PhD candidate means that you have a Radboud University full professor (i.e., me) as supervisor but have no employment contract with the Radboud University. Neither the university nor I personally have any legal relation with you (nor, by implication, any obligations to you). It’s all basically a feudal relationship based on honour.

An important hurdle for the PhD candidate is formed by the formal requirements for admission, which (for external candidates) are usually only checked at the end of the process, i.e., shortly before the public defence of the PhD thesis – and given the enormous repercussions of a failure to pass this test, it’s wise to check whether you qualify right now. Anyone who wishes to pursue a doctorate at Radboud University Nijmegen has to be in the possession of a recognized Master's degree. A foreign Master's degree may not always be enough. The completed study of a foreign candidate should be the equivalent of a complete and completed Dutch university programme. Equivalence is established through an individual assessment via [http://www.ru.nl/students/phd/application_and/](http://www.ru.nl/students/phd/application_and/)
And then there are ‘minor’ hurdles:
* Language skills: we require full mastery of English idiom and grammar.
* Original research: each PhD research project and dissertation must be original work. The candidate must always make an original contribution to the body of knowledge in his or her field. No dallying around on hobby horses.
* Quality control: Not only the promotor or supervisor, but also an independent manuscript committee has to approve the thesis, and subsequently the thesis has to be defended in a public ceremony against opposition from a committee of experts. In the future, an independent committee may also be called in to approve research proposals at the start of the tragedy.

**Quid pro quo**
If you are still interested, let me tell you what I have to offer as an individual supervisor for your external PhD project – and then I’ll explain what I would ask from you.

What I have to **offer**, assuming yours is a 5 year project:

**Year 1**
Once: intake on the basis of, and feedback on, your first *informal* project proposal
* The informal proposal has to be written in excellent English or Dutch, so I can get an impression of your qualities as an author, communicator and systematic thinker
* The informal proposal introduces the proposed topic of research at least against some kind of (theoretical/philosophical) background (“embedding”) and gives at least some grounds to believe the research to be scientifically/philosophically relevant and innovative.
* I will consider plans for a PhD thesis in the Dutch language only when convincing grounds are offered for the use of a (from an academic point of view) dead language.
* Of course the informal proposal should include a CV including publications (if any). The names and e-mail addresses of one or two referees would be welcome but please do **not** include actual letters of recommendation.

Once, after ca. 9 months: discussion of and feedback on a formal research proposal.
* The formal proposal consists of two parts: a text of ca. 5000 words following the format of normal, subsidized research projects, and an at least 15,000 words long ‘synopsis’, a text setting out the plan, structure, main questions, order, content etc. of the thesis already following the proposed chapter schedule. Again, perfect English or Dutch is a condition sine qua non. The first text should prove the viability and feasibility of the project to any in- or outsider (and should indicate that the project fits in the departmental research profile), the second moves one step beyond that by arguing for the viability and feasibility of the exact argument that is to be developed in the thesis. The format of the second text obviously depends on the kind of thesis you want to write: a thesis built chapter after (on) chapter, a thesis built first as a skeleton then ‘beefed up’, or a collection of articles unified by an introduction and conclusion.

**Year 2**
At the beginning of Year 2: feedback on the first chapter of the thesis – which ought to contain the Introduction to the thesis, including (in broad lines) context of the question, the question itself, its theoretical relevance; the plan for the next chapters and (as a dud) a first inkling of the conclusion.
Like the three previous documents, this one also serves to consider a fail/go decision for the whole project.

After a Go decision:
* formal appointment on (as it is called) a 0,0 basis in the department, which comes with a webpage for you and your project, a formal affiliation, access to the library (physical and online) and several other research facilities. Definitely no salary, though.
* participation in the local researchers’ network, opportunities to present chapters to others and receive feedback, and opportunities to learn from their work.
* support in applications for research subsidies and grants.

Years 2-4
Twice yearly: feedback on individual chapters: main argumentative lines, consistency, completeness and logic of the argument, adequate embedding in existing literature, suggestions for further reading, style (both linguistic and academic). Badly written texts (incomplete texts, semi-note-style bits, incorrect grammar, syntax or spelling, sloppy or un-academic lay-out) will be refused. Life is too short.
Once a year: reflection on progress

Year 5:
Feedback on the first complete version of the thesis, feedback on the inevitably substantially revised (second) version of the thesis, final decision on pass-go on the basis of the third, ideally only slightly revised, full version. I expect that the composition of the Manuscript Committee (3-5 independent academics who decide on the suggestion that your thesis be submitted for public defence) and the ‘promotion’ (public and formal defence in front of an extended committee consisting of the Manuscript Committee and several others, In front of public) will take place in Year 6 – this whole (for you unproductive) process can easily take up to 9 months.

In general:
I encourage you to find other experts willing to read parts of your text, but many will demand something in return for their time and effort. While I am open to their inclusion as members of the extended committee, they cannot serve on the Manuscript Committee (exposure to earlier fragments of the thesis ‘contaminates’ their impartiality), and I definitely do not accept extra captains on the ship (i.e., shared supervision, so-called ‘additional and co-promotors’) unless agreed upon before the end of Year 1.

What I ask from you:

Research proposals that…
* are scientifically/philosophically relevant and innovative either in question or in approach. There is no room for the pursuit of sheer individual interests, nor for the use of your research as a disguise for political, religious or social activism; the PhD thesis must be a work proving your academic competencies. Neither I nor any Manuscript Committee will accept a sub-standard personal statement. What you do with the results of your work in the margins of the project, in your own spare time, is your own business. In fact, I actually support political and social activities there.
* fall within the broad field of my own interests: political philosophy and theory, applied ethics etc., in the Anglo-Saxon rather than German or French tradition (though whiffs of
either one can be quite refreshing). I do of course have a slight preference for environmental political thought, theories of justice (distributive and commutative), liberalism and humanism. * are compatible with my department’s research program.

…are written by researchers who
* known that a PhD project requires, and are willing and able to devote, at least 16 hours a week of concentrated lonely work during at least five years;
* do not take irresponsible risks with their day jobs, finances, families or health in pursuing the PhD project
* do not confuse professional experience with qualification as a researcher; more often than not, experience is instead an obstacle and a hindrance, as a PhD thesis requires abstract, context-free thinking aimed at the universalizability of your research. Experience can often only add anecdotal illustrations.
* are willing to publish at least two articles (e.g. based on chapters) in international professional journals, in addition to the thesis proper.
* are willing to participate at least once a year in an academic conference (national or international)
* are good planners and reliable partners.
* are not irreversibly shocked by the university’s demand that you submit at least 75 printed copies (preferably in book form) of the approved thesis before the public defence – for which you will be paid tuppence.