



WHAT THE
HUMANITIES
CONTRIBUTE TO THE
UNIVERSITY

SUMMER SEMINAR
AUGUST 21-23, 2017

BOOKLET



VU  **VRIJE
UNIVERSITEIT
AMSTERDAM**

Please find all route descriptions and contact information in the back of the booklet.

The Epistemic Goals and Status of the Humanities

MONDAY AUGUST 21ST

Room: Agora 1

09:00 – 09.30 **Registration and coffee**

09.30 – 09.45 **Opening**

09.45 – 11.00 **Stephen Grimm (Fordham University)**
“The Humanities, Understanding, and Wisdom”

11.00 – 11.30 **Coffee Break**

11.30 – 12.45 **Mary Poplin (Claremont Graduate University)**
“The Tragic Consequences of the Secular Imperative on the Humanities: New Possibilities”

12.45 – 14.00 **Lunch**

14.00 – 15.15 **Suzanne Keen (Washington and Lee University)**
“Literature and Empathy”

15.15 – 15.45 **Coffee Break**

15.45 – 17.00 **Jennifer Gosetti-Ferencei (Fordham University & University of Birmingham)**
“On poetry and Truth”

17.30 – 19.00 **Dinner @ The Basket**

19.00 Entry **Theatre Show: An Evening with C.S. Lewis**

20.00 Start show

The Humanities and the Big Questions

TUESDAY AUGUST 22nd

Room: Agora 1

- 09.30 – 10.45 **Gijsbert van den Brink (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)**
“Was thinking of Theology as the Queen of the Sciences a Mistake?”
- 10.45 – 11.15 **Coffee Break**
- 11.15 – 12.30 **Rik Peels (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)**
“How Literature Embodies Unique Epistemic Value: A Case Study of Ignorance, Knowledge, and Understanding in Thomas Hardy’s Tess of the D’Urbervilles and Edith Wharton’s Summer”
- 12.30 – 13.45 **Lunch**
- 13.45 – 15.00 **Klemens Kappel (University of Copenhagen)**
“The role of the Humanities in Liberal Democracy”
- 15.00 – 15.30 **Break**
- 15.30 – 16.45 **Andrew Briggs (Oxford University)**
“Science and Humanities—Penultimate and Ultimate Curiosity?”
- 17.30 – **Dinner @ Strand Zuid**

Why the Humanities Matter

WEDNESDAY AUGUST 23rd

Room: Agora 1

- 09.30 – 10.45 **Maartje Janse (Leiden University)**
“Does History Teach us Anything?”
- 10.45 – 11.15 **Coffee Break**
- 11.15 – 12.30 **Marcus Düwell (Utrecht University)**
“On the Uses and Abuses of the Humanities for University and for Society at large”
- 12.30 – 13.45 **Lunch**
- 13.45 – 15.00 **Michael Lynch (University of Connecticut)**
“Truth, Politics and the Humanistic Attitude”
- 15.00 – 15.30 **Coffee Break**
- 15.30 – 17.00 **Sabine Roeser (Delft University of Technology), Ben Peperkamp (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam), Michael Lynch (University of Connecticut)**
Panel discussion on Valorization in the Humanities
- 17.00 – 18.00 **Closing Drinks @ The Basket (VU Campus)**

Abstracts

MONDAY AUGUST 21ST

09.45 – 11.00 **Stephen Grimm (Fordham University)**

“The Humanities, Understanding, and Wisdom”

This session will explore how the study of literature, history, and philosophy are crucially related to the epistemic goods of understanding and wisdom. We will see that understanding is deeply related to our sense of possibility—how we think various things might be—and the study of literature and history are essential for shaping and enlarging our sense of possibility. I will also claim that literature and history help enlarge our sense of how we might live and what is worth caring about—and that the cultivation of this sense is deeply tied to the development of wisdom.

11.30 – 12.45 **Mary Poplin (Claremont Graduate University)**

“The Tragic Consequences of the Secular Imperative on the Humanities: New Possibilities”

Once the humanities, buttressed by Judeo-Christian principles kept alive the human heart’s yearning for the good, the true and the beautiful. The secular imperative in higher education, with only man to make himself, questioned the very existence of these virtues, adding an intense fascination with the darker sides of human nature. This project, thus far, has limited the university’s range of possibilities. It’s strong rejection of the Judeo-Christian framework, denies the university’s claim to be the free open marketplace of ideas, rejects pluralism, and limits both wide exploration and expression. Judeo-Christian thought still offers unique possibilities unavailable from any other source, wherein the humanities can reignite the human imagination with the possibilities of a redeemed nature.

14.00 – 15.15 **Suzanne Keen (Washington and Lee University)**

“Does exposure to imaginative literature that evokes empathy create or increase readers’ capacity for empathy and altruism, and if so, how would we know?”

Literary empathy studies draws on research and theorizing in three distinct areas of psychology (cognitive, developmental, and social psychology), on philosophical work in ethics (moral philosophy), and on recent developments in neuroscience. This lecture discusses the debates and challenges of the

interdisciplinary research context for literary theories of narrative empathy, including readers' empathy, authors' strategic empathizing, and the relationship of empathy for textual creations to prosocial action in the real world.

15.45 – 17.00 **Jennifer Gosetti-Ferencei (Fordham University & University of Birmingham)**
"Poetry and Truth"

At the heart of philosophical discussions of poetry is its relation to truth, on which philosophers have been divided from Plato to the present. While even its harshest critics tend to admit that poetry can convey some truth, the question remains whether truthfulness is intrinsic to successful poetry, and whether there is a mode of truthfulness that is distinctly poetic. Phenomenological hermeneutics proposes that poetry enacts a form of revealing, a disclosure of the world, a capacity enabled by poetry's productive defamiliarization of language, while at least one critical theoretical approach validates poetry only as an 'illusory' form of art. These more recent views of poetry will be considered against the backdrop of the historical debate, and in light of a tension between poetry's mimetic or reproductive relation to reality and its productive generation of images and ideas. Poetry may both reveal and create, reflect the actual and engage the possible, while generating alternatives to the real that, by their very divergence, have implications for reality, by relativizing a given manifestation or interpretation of it. It will be considered whether poetry's most compelling revealings may be less of the world itself, than of the ways in which we experience and come to know it.

TUESDAY AUGUST 22ND

09.30 – 10.45 **Gijsbert van den Brink (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)**
"Was thinking of theology as the queen of the sciences a mistake?"

In this lecture, I will first explore why theology ever received the honorary title of *regina scientiarum*. Next, I will sketch how theology's academic status crumbled over time, so that the discipline is now often seen at best as a quixotic remnant of bygone times. Finally, I will argue that this latter reputation is far from adequate, and elucidate how the systematic study of life's most profound questions from a transcendent perspective is still vital to present-day academic life.

11.15 – 12.30 **Rik Peels (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)**
"How Literature Embodies Unique Epistemic Value: A Case Study of Ignorance, Knowledge, and Understanding in Thomas Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles and Edith Wharton's Summer"

Some adherents of scientism, such as Alex Rosenberg, claim that the natural sciences deliver epistemic values such as knowledge and understanding, whereas, say, literature and literary studies, merely have aesthetic value. Many of those working in the field of literary studies oppose this idea. But it isn't clear at all exactly how works of literary art embody knowledge and understanding and how literary studies can bring these out. After all, they are pieces of fiction, which suggests that they are not meant to represent the actual world. I argue that literature and literary studies nonetheless contain, confer, and bring about non-trivial knowledge and understanding in a variety of ways: they confer moral propositional knowledge, they question certain misguided concepts and hermeneutical frameworks, and they deliver non-propositional insight and understanding with respect to meaning, virtue, and significance. I also defend the view that literature has a couple of unique tools that make it especially suited to pursue and reach these epistemic values. In the course of the argument, I refer at several junctures to Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and Edith Wharton's *Summer*, two novels that criticize dominant moral and social norms and paradigms, and in which the main character herself goes through of phase of (often harsh) knowledge acquisition.

13.45 – 15.00 **Klemens Kappel (University of Copenhagen)**

"The role of the humanities in liberal democracy"

A classical view on the role of science in liberal democracy dates back at least to Weber, and holds roughly that there should be a distinctive division of cognitive and deliberative labor in democratic decision-making. Science should, so to speak, supply the facts when they are not otherwise obvious, but remain neutral on political questions. Political decisions, on the other hand, should be made by democratic institutions, where these institutions should remain respectful of the facts provided by the scientific institutions.

This classical framework (as I will call it) for the role of science in liberal democracy is widely accepted among scientists and policy makers, but at the same time widely criticized and even derided among philosophers of science, sociologists of science, and policy scholars, not to mention cynical politicians and opportunistic scientists. The main philosophical objections are that it is based on untenable distinctions between facts and values, or presuppose utopian ideas of a value free science, or outdated notions of truth. Historically, more sweeping objections have been based on rejections of the very idea of a liberal democracy, and maybe this type of objection is no longer of mere historical interest.

I believe that if we accept the ideal of liberal democracy, then we should want scientific institutions that conform to the classical framework, given that our actual political system is sufficiently close to a well-functioning liberal democracy. I also believe that in so far as natural science and social science is concerned, then the framework is defensible against the broad swath of philosophical objections leveled against it: the division of labor central to the framework does not rest on implausible ideas about the separation of facts and values, and it does not require that should be value-free in a way it cannot be.

Yet, the framework raises questions of interpretation for the humanities, on the widely believed assumption that the humanities differ from both natural and social science. Given that we accept the framework, what is the distinctive role (if any) of the humanities in liberal democracy? Are there reasons why the humanities should be exempt from the strictures of the framework, or does it apply to the humanities as well? If it does, how should university researchers in the humanities conduct their research, teaching and public outreach, and their interaction with researchers from other fields to stay within the framework?

15.30 – 16.45 **Andrew Briggs (Oxford University)**

“Science and humanities—penultimate and ultimate curiosity?”

Science flourishes best in cultures that are also curious about questions which science cannot answer. The spectacular success of science is due in part to restricting itself to questions which are amenable to scientific methods. But science need not be separated from other methods of inquiry. Time and again, where a culture or a community or even an individual has been interested in ultimate questions about meaning and purpose, and how humans can love and how God can be known, that has proved conducive to the curiosity about the material world which now manifests itself as science. You can think of this as a kind of entanglement between religion and science. But those words have each changed their meaning over time, and these categories must not be read into cultural contexts in which they were not necessarily distinct in the way they are now. ‘Science’ and ‘the humanities’ can each refer either to a body of knowledge or to methods of arriving at knowledge. They tend to be understood as the former by non-specialists, with the concomitant risk that such knowledge is misrepresented as finite and fixed. Scientists and scholars working at the cutting edge take a more humble approach, recognizing how incomplete our knowledge is, but with a different risk, of thinking that theirs is the only way to certain knowledge. Curiosity about ultimate questions requires all available sources of knowledge and methods of enquiry, from the sciences and the humanities. And then something more

WEDNESDAY AUGUST 23RD

09.30 – 10.45 **Maartje Janse (Leiden University)**

“Does history teach us anything?”

What is the value of history for the university and society at large? Based on her research of the first large-scale social movements in the nineteenth century, Maartje Janse will explore the way historical (and other) knowledge can shape people’s expectations and actions, thereby influencing the course of

history itself. History can produce self-fulfilling prophecies. At the same time it will always suggest alternative explanations and trajectories, as it expands what is thinkable for scholars and citizens alike.

11.15 – 12.30 **Marcus Düwell (Utrecht University)**

“On the Uses and Abuses of the Humanities for University and for Society at large”

There are extensive discussions about the usefulness of the humanities. The paper defends the view that the humanities have a specific task in helping human beings to get better understanding of themselves as practical beings. The study of history, language, culture, art and philosophy is ultimately not only relevant to understand human culture as a specific domain of our world but it is relevant to have the opportunity to integrate diverse (scientific, cultural, aesthetic, moral etc.) perspectives on the world from the perspective of practical beings. To have this opportunity is particular important in the current world characterized by significant changes and challenges. Ultimately the humanities are focused on the question what it means to be a human being.

13.45 – 15.00 **Michael Lynch (University of Connecticut)**

“Truth, Politics and the Humanistic Attitude

Yeats’ admonished that the best can lack all conviction while the worst are often filled with passionate intensity. And of course he is right; dogmatism is bad, but so is skeptical nonchalance. Liberal irony does not make you want to stand up and speak truth to power; it makes you want to order another espresso. Steering between these extremes—between ironic indifference on the one hand and dogmatic conviction on the other—is a particularly pressing problem for contemporary western democracies, which are becoming more deeply polarized. To solve it, we must rely on work from psychology and political science. But we must also look to the humanities. In this paper, I’ll argue that part of the solution lies in some values and attitudes embedded in the humanistic attitude. It rests on seeing that our very existence as responsible knowers—as epistemic agents—depends on our embracing both convictions and what I’ll call epistemic humility.

15.30 – 17.00 **Sabine Roeser (Delft University of Technology)**

Ben Peperkamp (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam)

Michael Lynch (University of Connecticut)

Panel discussion on valorization in the humanities

Route description to Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Venue address

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
De Boelelaan 1105
1081 HV Amsterdam

> **See the next pages for a route description at the VU Campus**

Route to the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

VU Amsterdam is located close to the railroad station Amsterdam Zuid – WTC. From the city center you can reach VU with tram line 5, 16 and 24 or metro line 51.

Transportation

Travelers arriving at Schiphol can take the train to Station Amsterdam Zuid. There are direct intercity trains from Schiphol that go straight to this station. The journey takes approximately 15 minutes. You can buy a ticket:

- At the yellow self-service ticket machines. Payment can be done by debit card (Maestro) or coins. Unfortunately, not all ticket machines accept credit cards.
- At a service desk at a larger railway station. There is a €0.50 charge for using this service.
- Information on (bus/train) schedules can be found on the NS website or at www.9292ov.nl/en.

From Station Amsterdam Zuid

It is a ten-minute walk to the VU, and there are signs to the VU on the Southern exit of the station. However, if you want to take public transport, it is one stop on either:

- metro 51 (1 minute), direction Amstelveen Westwijk
- tram 5 (1 minute), direction Amstelveen Binnenhof

From Station Amsterdam Centraal:

- metro 51 to De Boelelaan/VU. Enter in the subway station under the main train station
- tram 5 to De Boelelaan/VU. Enter on the West side of the station square.
- tram 16 or 24 to De Boelelaan/VU. Enter on the East side of the station square.

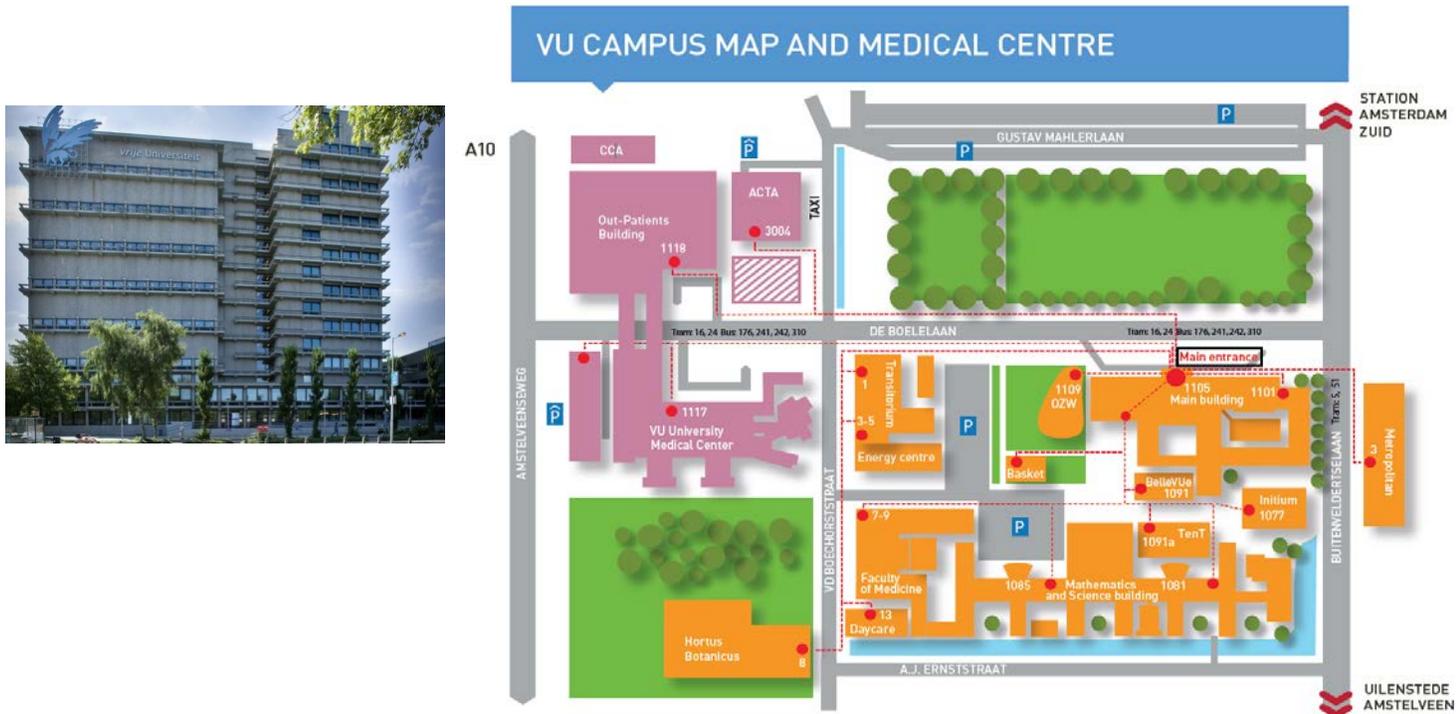
Travelling by car

The A-10 Amsterdam ring road can be reached from all directions. Follow the A10 to the Zuid/Amstelveen exit S 108. Turn left at the end of the slip road onto Amstelveenseweg: after about three hundred yards (at the VU University hospital building) turn left again onto De Boelelaan. VU University Amsterdam can be reached via city routes S 108 and S 109

> **PLEASE NOTE THAT THE A10 WILL BE UNDER CONTRUCTION THIS SUMMER**

More info: www.rijkswaterstaat.nl/english/highways/a10-west/index.aspx

Route description at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam



CONFERENCE ROOM: AGORA 1

The conference room is located at the third floor of the **Main Building** of the VU.

Please follow the sign in the VU and the following description:

1. Enter the VU through the Main Entrance
2. Go to the left and take
 - a. The yellow elevator at the far end of the hall to the third floor; **OR**
 - b. The stairs to the third floor.
3. Walk straight ahead to the end of the hallway

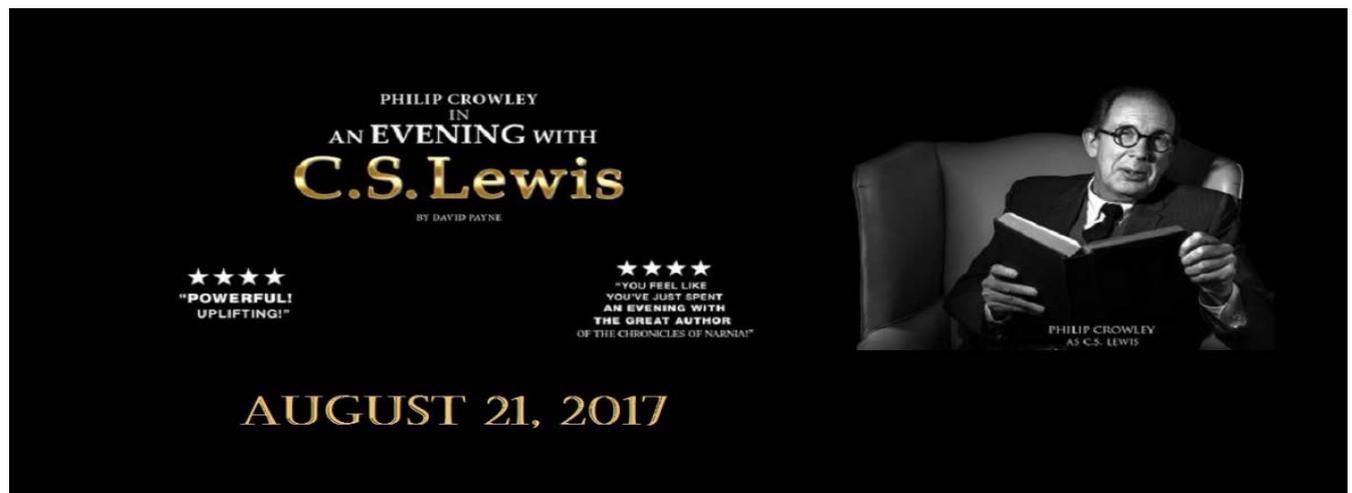
Dinner day 1: The Basket

Address

The Basket
De Boelelaan 1109 B
1081 HV Amsterdam

The Basket is located in the middle of the campus of the VU (see map on the previous page).

Theatre Show: Cultuurcentrum De Griffioen



Address

Cultuurcentrum De Griffioen
Uilenstede 106
1183 AM Amstelveen

Route to the Griffioen

From the VU/ the Basket:

- Take tram 5 or metro 51 in the direction of Amstelveen
- Stop at 'Uilenstede'
- Follow the signs to de Griffioen



>> *See also the map on the next page!*



Walking route to the Griffioen from metro stop 'Uilenstede'

Dinner day 2: Strand Zuid

Address

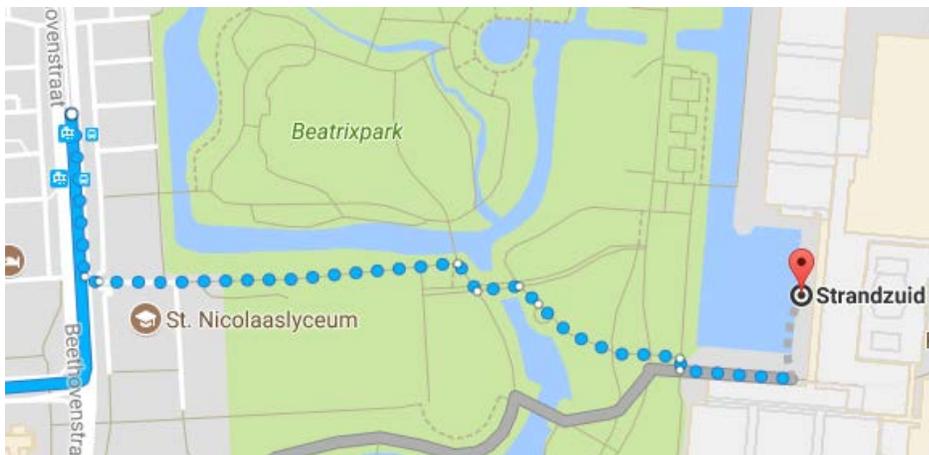
Strand Zuid
Europaplein 22
1078 GZ Amsterdam

Route to Strand Zuid

By public transport:

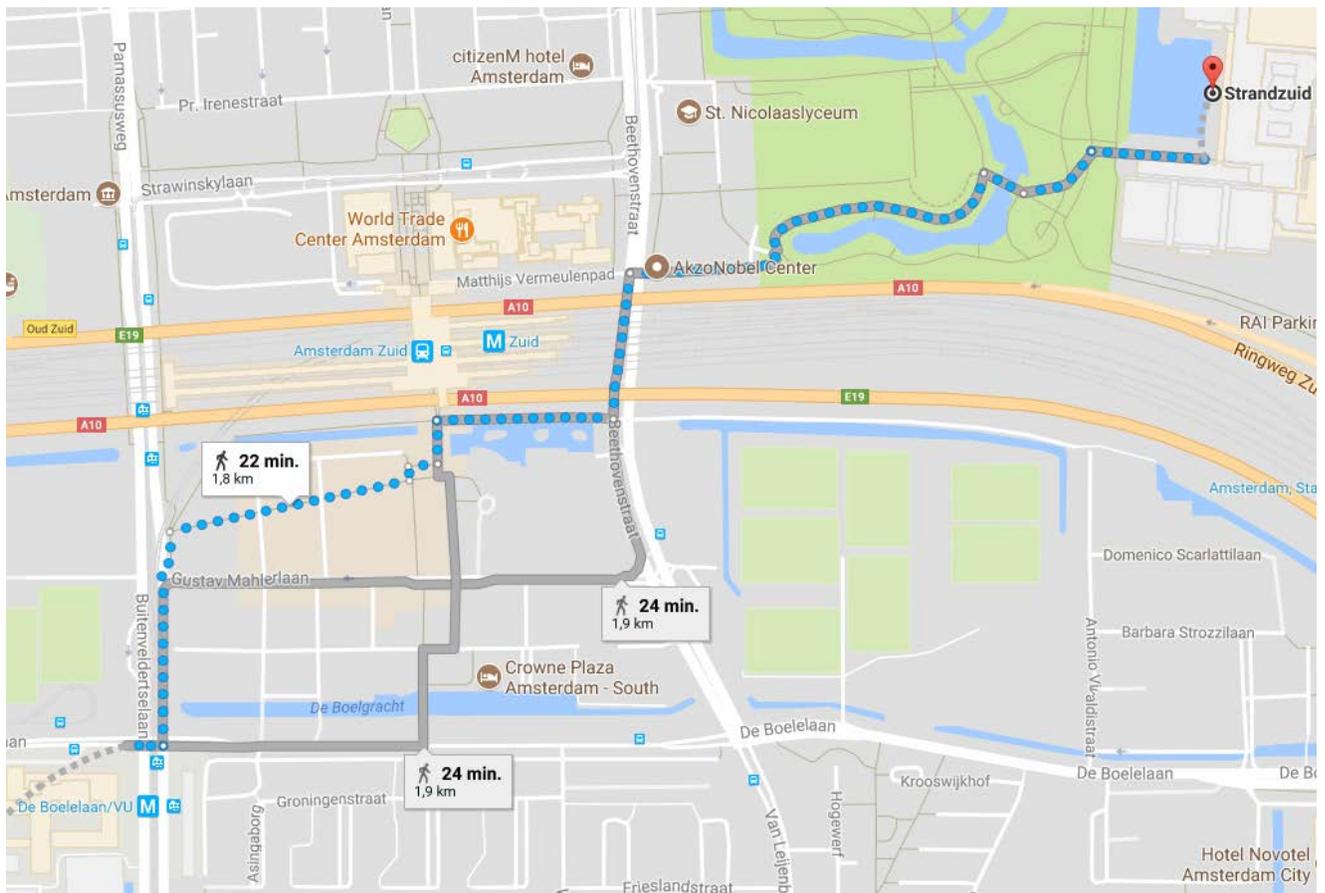
- Take tram 5 direction Central Station
- Stop at 'Prinses Irenestraat/Beethovenstraat'
- Walk to Strand Zuid (10 minutes) > see the map below

By foot: *see next page!*



Route to Strand Zuid

Walking (22 minutes):



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