

What does Rudolf Steiner mean when he employs the term *Geisteswissenschaft*? Where in his writings or in secondary sources about Steiner, can I find a discussion of the term?

According to *Duden: Deutsches Universalwoerterbuch*, 1989:

*Wissenschaft* is research or study supporting argumentatively based knowledge in a given area (“argumentativ gestuetztes Wissen hervorbringende forschende Taetigkeit in einem bestimmten Bereich”)

*Naturwissenschaft* (Engl. natural science) is the totality of exact sciences (“exakte Wissenschaften”) whose object is the various aspects of nature (or a branch of science focused on a selected aspect of nature such as neurobiology)

*Exakte Wissenschaft* is science whose results depend on logical or mathematical proofs, or on precise measurements.

*Geisteswissenschaft* is the totality of sciences whose object of study are the different aspects of culture and of intellectual and spiritual life (“Gesamtheit der Wissenschaften, die die verschiedenen Gebiete der Kultur und des geistigen Lebens zum Gegenstand haben”).

Conventionally, in the U.S. the term *Geisteswissenschaften* is translated as humanities, but humanities are not considered scientific in method or precision.

According to Webster, humanities are “those subjects, as philosophy and literature, and the fine arts, that are concerned with human beings and their culture, as distinguished from the sciences.”

Science (Webster) is “the observation, identification, description, experimental investigation, and theoretical explanation of natural phenomena.” However, science can also be any “methodological activity, discipline, or study” (i.e. *Wissenschaft*).

In other words, both in German and in American usage humanistic study can be scientific (*wissenschaftlich*) in methodology and rigor of intellectual discipline, but its object of study is humanity rather than nature.

In German the emphasis in the humanities on human-directed study is referred to by the term *Geist-*.

According to *Duden*, the word *Geist* has a range of meanings:

- Reason, conscious thought
- Attitude, inner tendency
- A person seen under the aspect of certain mental or inner tendencies (“He is a creative spirit”)
- Life force, breath or soul (archaic; now mostly in reference to death: “he gave up his ghost/ breathed his last/expired)

- Spiritual being (“God is Spirit,” “The Holy Spirit,” “The Evil Spirit (devil)”
- Ghost or spook (revenant dead person)
- Nature spirit