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| The term theosophy, derived from the Greek *theo* (divine) and *sophia* (wisdom), refers generally to *divine wisdom* and its mystical interpretation. Arising in the third century, the word theosophy acted as a synonym for theology until the sixteenth century, when Jakob Boehme, drawing on Neo-Platonism and alchemy, described it as divine knowledge by which man interprets the natural world — an idea of great importance to the Romantics. In the late nineteenth century, formal groups of theosophical adepts emerged, primary among them the Theosophical Society formed in 1875 by Helena Blavatsky. Her books, such as *The Secret Doctrine,* contain the tenets of modern theosophy (in Germany, anthroposophy), defined as ‘the accumulated wisdom of the ages’ from which all religious systems are derived. Blavatsky produced a polytheistic mélange of Theravada Buddhism, Brahmanic Hinduism, ancient Egyptian belief, and a notion of polygenetic ‘root races’ that rose and declined over time. Most significant was her neo-Romantic claim that all human souls were linked through a Universal Over-Soul and reincarnation. Theosophists (Allan Hume and Annie Besant) founded the Indian National Congress and supported Mohandas K. Gandhi’s resistance to the Raj. Many artists borrowed from Theosophy, including Frank Baum, Leo Tolstoy, W. B. Yeats, D. H. Lawrence, Alexander Scriabin, and Wassily Kandinsky, among others. |
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| Further reading:  (Schüller) |