Article

Beyond the Cosmic Ladder: The Ultimate State, According to Julius Evola and Paul Brunton[1]

By Joscelyn Godwin

ne purpose of this paper is to explain and compare two modern ys of the ultimate in human ciousness. I have chosen Julius a and Paul Brunton because of e close coincidences of life and rine, despite their contrasting onalities, and for the clarity and ctivity of their writing. In my erstanding they both furthered the osophical current, though neither ned to have received his wisdom Masters or from clairvoyance, nor they concerned with mapping the ic ladder. Instead, they proposed ultimate challenge: to get beyond it ether.

Although they discouraged osity about their family roots and life, some synchronicities are h mentioning. Evola (1898-1974) born in Rome into a middle-class ly of Sicilian origin, which he dismissed as follows: "I owe very little to the milieu in which I was born, to the education which I received, and to my own blood."[2] Brunton (1898-1981) was born the same year into London's Jewish diaspora, of which he wrote: "The narrow matrix in which heredity attempted to mould my nature, I early broke and discarded, for my whole thought and temperament were of another cast."[3]

Aside from conventional schooling they were autodidacts: neither completed higher education.[4] In the First World War, when Britain and Italy were allies, Evola served as an artillery officer, Brunton in a tank regiment. At the war's end, aged 21, they emerged into the tumultuous postwar culture of Rome and London, respectively. At first they were drawn to Bohemian circles: Evola as a painter and both of them as occasional poets, then to the occultist

eu whose visible center, in both cities, the Theosophical Society. Brunton ed the Astrological Lodge in April ;[5] Evola never joined the Society, participated in Rome's Independent osophical League and made lasting acts there. They were soon attracted astern wisdom, Evola to Taoism Tantrism, Brunton to Vedanta and dhism. They also had close friends ne Anthroposophical movement—nton heard Steiner lecture in London 919—but kept their independence all organizations. By their early ties they had found their vocation riters, supported by independent nalism.

Evola and Brunton had both rienced unusual states of ciousness, but came to them by different ways. By the age of en, Brunton had discovered a book Sufi, Ibn Tufail's *Awakening of the* Inspired by its example of self-ation, he took up daily meditation after what he calls "eighteen ths of burning aspiration for the tual Self . . . underwent a series nystical ecstasies."[6] Evola began itation in wartime, while stationed he mountains, for no apparent on beyond disgust with life and wish for dissolution. This led to a series of illuminations and adventures in the supersensible world that he later described in some detail.[7] He also made temporary use of drugs (notably ether) which gave him what he calls "forms of consciousness removed from ordinary sense perception."[8]

Each in his own fashion suffered the "dark night of the soul." Evola, a warrior at heart, regretted that the war had given him no real military action, and returned to civilian life with a sense of emptiness that brought him at the age of 23 to the brink of suicide. Suddenly he happened to read a passage from the Buddhist scriptures which stated that even the urge to extinction was only another bondage from which to be freed. "At that moment, I believe, a change took place within me, and I acquired steadfastness capable of overcoming all crises."[9] Later he took up the daily practice of Buddhist meditation.[10]

Brunton records a loss of his early aspirations after the war and an intense dislike of the city's atmosphere, to which suicide seemed the only rational solution.[11] He gave himself two weeks to prepare for the deed by studying books on death in the British Museum, and there discovered spiritualism, which so fascinated him that he postponed his suicide for another two weeks, and then

efinitely. His meditation resumed
n renewed vigor, and soon he
eived a tremendous initiatory vision
a sense of his appointed mission.
m then onwards both young men
e set on their lifetime's path,
iring to the complete transcendence
ne common human condition.

Brunton was the first to publish
fruit of his experiences. By 1919 he
contributing to the *Occult Review*,
main independent journal of its
d in England. His framework at
point was broadly Theosophical.
quoted Steiner and Annie Besant,
ussed planetary influences, and
te, as he would always write, on
borderline between the intellectual
the inspirational. A short article
1921 about the Mystic and the
ultist as the "two faces of man"
out a distinction that would be
ial in Brunton's later work: the
erence between the mystic and the
osopher, here called the Occultist.[12]
uses Theosophical terms to
cribe how the Mystic is at home in
astral realm, but has to move up to
buddhic realm. The corresponding
for the Occultist is to move from
lower mental plane to the higher
tal plane. Brunton warns of the
alls on both paths, and says that
the only guarantee, for both types, is selfless love.

Evola was meanwhile working with similar ideas but on a larger scale. By 1924 he had completed an imposing treatise on the "Theory and Phenomenology of the Absolute Individual."[13] The first volume surveys the idealist philosophies of East and West; the second is concerned with experience, notably on the higher path which Evola calls "magical idealism." Benedetto Croce, at the time Italy's most eminent philosopher, facilitated publication of the two-volume work.

Allowing for their different styles, their metaphysical systems were developing in parallel, with a ladder that placed religion at the bottom, mysticism in the middle, and philosophy or magic at the top. Evola had little regard for the bottom rung: he wrote that "any religion, if it is really religion and not something else, is mysticism";[14] Brunton, that religion "ought never to forget its higher purpose which is to fit the more advanced among its flock for the next higher degree,"[15] namely for mysticism. And for both, the degree beyond mysticism was distinguished by a quasi-scientific objectivity. Evola says that "unlike mysticism, magic would be primarily defined by the positively

tive and objective character of its ice."[16] Brunton, that the "hidden sophy" "arrives at completeness sults, uncontradictability of truth the verified principle underlying nases of experience and knowledge h when attained, makes everything nderstood"[17]

Neither writer leaves the reader y doubt about the perils awaiting spirant. Brunton warns that the ltist who turns his energies to onal ambition runs the risk of ring the very real sphere of black c, or occult selfishness . . . then s a really lost soul."[18] Evola writes once a certain state is reached, nind must be "absolutely neutral rds any sort of subjective effort and tite," otherwise its tendencies can erate a chaos which would block way to any higher realization," in a footnote he mentions black c as exploiting such projections e developed but impure mind.[19] too treats the nature of love, not ything sentimental or moral but active and purificatory suffering, ng to "the freedom of a life in such ossession that . . . it can give all, se all without thinking of itself."[20] But it does not stop there. To guish themselves from teachers of mystic paths and from academic philosophy, Evola and Brunton made it clear that theirs was a path of action, not just contemplation. Their concept of the ultimate state was not the merging of the dewdrop into the shining sea (as in the closing lines of Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia*), but the return to the marketplace (as in the Zen Buddhist *Oxherding Pictures*). Brunton criticized the yogis of India for their indifference to the world and renunciation of action. Evola wrote that "development is an illusion when it does not affect and act on the factual, bodily reality in which men live."[21]

They were equally pragmatic in their mapping of the human being. Brunton soon dropped those allusions to the multiple planes and principles of man which the Theosophists had been so diligent in elaborating. Evola was never tempted by them. Two were enough: for Evola, the "I" of common experience, and the transcendent I that he called the Absolute Individual. Brunton, starting with his *Secret Path* of 1935,[22] called them the ego and the Overself. He adapted the latter term from Emerson's "Oversoul," replacing the religious connotations of "soul" with the immediacy of "self." Thus the process of the "quest," of "high magic," or of whatever one calls

development of man's ultimate ibilities, was framed by its starting end-points. But how was one to go t it?

The great failing of the Theosophical ety, in the view of its more ambitious bers, was its lack of practical uction. Blavatsky's writings were of the allurements of occultism, but her they nor the neo-Theosophists—nt, Leadbeater, Bailey—taught how to become an occultist. There a few exceptions. The earliest osophical Society in New York indulged the members' hopes for normal powers and astral travel, Blavatsky's departure for India d any such instruction that she have given in private. The Esoteric on that she founded in response to nt demand remained secretive and mely select. This accounts for the ess of a rival body, the Hermetic herhood of Luxor, which was little than a mail-order service but at offered some practical instruction d on Paschal Beverly Randolph's ods: sex, drugs, and magic mirrors. olf Steiner was a safer guide, of se work Brunton and Evola were aware.[23] But books alone were not gh. If their natural gifts, already ordinary, were to bear fruit, they needed personal guidance. Brunton names two mentors: an "advanced mystic" called Mr. Thurston or "Brother M" who guided him through initiatic processes, and Allan Bennett, who had been one of Aleister Crowley's magical colleagues, then had taken Buddhist orders and returned to London to promote the Noble Eightfold Path.[24] Once Brunton began his travels to the East in 1930 he met numerous sages, adepts, and holy men, notably the Advaitin sage Sri Ramana Maharshi;[25] but by then he was well on his way.

Evola acknowledges no such personal guides, but he was familiar with initiatic groups that claimed a long ancestry and deep secrets. He credits Arturo Reghini, a Pythagorean, neopagan, and esoteric Freemason, for freeing him from his last occultist and Theosophical leanings.[26] He also knew members of Giuliano Kremmerz's Therapeutic and Magical Brotherhood of Myriam, who provided some of the exercises later used by the Ur Group that Evola and Reghini founded. Certainly the group's essays, taken as a whole, are outstanding among the practical manuals published in modern times. Evola contributed essays under at least four pseudonyms, Ea, Arvo, Agarda, and Iagla, reserving the latter

ccounts of his personal experiences
practical advice arising from them.
n the summer of 1925 Evola
a lecture to the Independent
sophical League of Rome on
ividuo e il divenire del mondo (The
idual and the Becoming of the
d). The League's journal published
er that year.[27] The main argument
ches philosophical idealism to the
It is one thing to persuade one's
ence that all they can ever know of
world is their own thoughts of it:
ton would write a whole volume
at.[28] But the words "of it" are the
In Evola's system there is no "it,"
eal world independent of one's
consciousness. Those interested
s arguments can read them for
selves; I will summarize their
usions.

The only thing I am absolutely
in of is my own consciousness. I
the world only as it appears to
It is a messy and unsatisfactory
d, separate from myself and
ng incessant desires in me.
people suffer this as the only
bility, reproaching the world for
mperfections vis-à-vis some idea
w it should be. Religions aid and
them. One higher solution is the
ic's abandonment of the world
for absorption in nirvana or some equivalent. Another is the Stoic's, who makes himself a bulwark of indifference to the world's inevitable assaults. Those do not satisfy Evola. He calls on the individual to find a principle in himself that is simple and ineffable: "that point of pure centrality of which the Upanishads speak . . . *the absolute presence* that *I am* in the depths of my individual being."[29]

At this point we move from theory to phenomenology, beyond the pale of academic philosophy, because Evola is writing about states of consciousness beyond the rational consensus, and only attainable through extraordinary effort. In this state of absolute presence, the outside world is no longer known as real, but rather as something missing and incomplete in oneself that demands reintegration.[30] This can only be achieved through the free action of the self, and only thus does the world become real.[31] Evola puts it in no uncertain terms: "We fiercely oppose all the intellectual and philosophical rhetoric in which man wastes time in discussions within his impotence (meaning when he talks about "truth," "objectivity," "rationality," etc.) instead of finally jumping to his feet, getting a grip on himself and, burning it up,

ing himself what he is: a *God, a tructor of worlds.*"[32]

When Evola read this paper to astonished Theosophists, he had ady finished his two-volume work the Absolute Individual. In one age he contrasts the Buddha of Hinayana, who attains an abstract, vidual liberation, with the Buddha ne Mahayana, a cosmic being who rns to the world, "sacrificing" self for its liberation. The principle ot a liberation from the world, but world as liberation.[33] In the same t, Evola contrasts the Apollonian the Dionysian way. Apollo's is the of detachment from an imperfect frightening world and the "horror e infinite," creating the surrogate of rderly and reliable cosmos.[34] For the aysian, in Evola's stirring words,

> There is only one obstacle: fear. Once that is overcome, Apollo is vanquished. Then in a timeless instant, like ice crystals touched by blocks of incandescent metal, the film of forms, of names, and all the exteriority of mind and heart vanishes and falls away. A great dawn rises, a higher levity; in the midst, a body woven of naked light; then slowly a new world, "no longer stained by the spirit," trans-formed. Finally the "heavens fall" and reveal the original tragedy of an ardent chaos, in which, in a flash, one attains the apex of absolute possession, which is the power of affirmation and of negation.[35]

The last pages of his treatise are indeed incandescent in their effort to convey the reality of the Absolute Individual, beyond all categories of thought, imagery, or logic. This prospect of transcending every shred of human personality to become an autonomous cosmic power, above even the gods, was the foundation for all his later work. If Evola did experience what he was writing about, there was no further to go. We will leave him there for now, still in his mid-twenties, and turn to corresponding ideas in Brunton's work.

Brunton's books of the 1930s were written to encourage Westerners to take up meditation, not as an exotic import but as a practical way to restore balance to modern life and discover their "inner reality," as one of the books is titled.[36] By Evola's standards they would qualify as Apollonian, rather than Dionysian, for the goal is the "inner world of the Overself [that] is our true homeland," where we can find "silent and eternal solace for our hearts."[37] The path,

·ver, is not all rosy. Here Brunton ibes one of its more challenging hes:

> 'he first-fruit of success will be feeling that one is being torn sunder from one's mooring in fe, a momentary loss of the ense of reality of the universe. : is like plunging into an abyss f infinity where the essence of ne's existence threatens to pass way beyond recall. This curious ondition mingles a momentary ut powerful fear of death with sense of being liberated. . . . bsolute fearlessness, *a readiness o die*, is now called for. Such a urning purpose will, with time, urn all resistance to ash and ust.[38]

Brunton's next project was to und a metaphysical system to serve orrective to current beliefs, whether ous or secular, and to give a rational dation to mystical experience. In *Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga* he ed the case for the mentalist world against the materialist, meaning the universe is fundamentally a al construct manifesting through iousness. In *The Wisdom of the elf*[39] he explained the interaction of ndividual Overself with the World Mind, and of that with the ultimate and ineffable reality he simply calls Mind. To students of Indian philosophy this was perhaps familiar ground, but Brunton adapted it to plain English. He added a series of exercises designed to make this philosophy an experiential reality and indeed a way of life.

Is Brunton's concept of the Overself the same as Evola's of the Absolute Individual? Yes and no. As I understand Brunton's scheme, in one sense the Overself exists as a distinct entity, but in another sense it is an aspect of the World Mind, of which it is like a single ray. That ray projects an indefinite series of egos or lives which, from the temporal point of view, form an evolutionary chain, of which one life will eventually achieve union with it. Thus every person is a stage on the way to the conscious identity with his or her Overself. Naturally this is a rare occurrence in times such as ours, but every step towards it, hence every individual, is of value. In Evola's scheme, on the contrary, the Absolute Individual does not have a history or intentions of its own: it is there to be realized, made real, only by the man who is capable of the task. His later writings insist that the immortality of the individual is conditional, not universal. But if that means that the ego, which

ıdes the psyche, is not immortal, ıton would certainly agree, unlike eachings of Christianity and Islam, hich the soul lives forever on the ıgth of a single life, or the beliefs of carnationists who can only imagine what transmigrates resembles their ent selves.

Brunton published no books in ast thirty years,[40] but continued to e, mostly in epigrammatic form, ing the results for publication his death in 1981. His admirers ed them in sixteen volumes of ebooks," following the author's classification.[41] Like Evola, he es of both the theory and the ıomenology of consciousness, but a difference even from his own ious writings. There he taught ıth, a quest, a method, and an lectual rationale for the experience e Overself. In the language of Yoga, ılminating state is called *nirvikalpa dhi*, absorption in the Absolute. ton now wrote from a still higher dpoint: that of *sahaja samadhi*, which e coexistence of that absorption normal consciousness.

I will summarize briefly from the :al hundred notes that Brunton e on this subject. Unlike the yogi, age (as Brunton calls the person in this condition) can lead an outwardly normal life while enjoying unbroken consciousness of the Absolute, even in deep sleep.[42] Along with the physical body he retains his individuality, but has no sense of personal attachment to them.[43] He watches the world-process with intelligent interest in the "interplay of cyclic impetus and karmic results,"[44] while being free of all negative thoughts or emotions about it,[45] or about his fellow humans: he knows and accepts them as they mentally are.[46] He will return to incarnation, time and again, to help all beings to attain truth and happiness.[47] But he is not a god. As though cautioning Evola's youthful excesses, Brunton writes: "It is a fallacy to think that this displacement of the lower self brings about its complete substitution by the infinite and absolute Deity. This fallacy is an ancient and common one in mystical circles and leads to fantastic declarations of self-deification. If the lower self is displaced, it is not destroyed. It lives on in strict subordination to the higher one, the Overself . . . "[48]

Whom did he have in mind? Scattered among this section of his notes are a few suggestive names, including Buddha and Jesus, Lao Tzu and Confucius, Sengai Gibon, St.

erine of Siena, Meister Eckhart, n Waldo Emerson, Vivekananda, ıda Mayee, Atmananda, and Sri ana Maharshi. Brunton asks: "Do men of realization live among us ?" and answers "Once I thought ut now I must honestly confess that e no proof of the existence of even a e one."[49] Elsewhere he says "There be some hiding in the monasteries bet or in the penthouses of New City,"[50] while "Nature works very and only attains her aim once in ltitude of throws. In mankind she well be contented if she creates one in a hundred million people."[51] be sure, anyone who publicly unces the fact of his illumination is mpostor.[52]

Evola was familiar with the ept of *sahaja samadhi* from his of Buddhism, especially what alls the "most extreme *Mahayana* ols."[53] In *The Doctrine of Awakening* eats their doctrine of non-difference een *Nirvana*—the Absolute—and *ara*—the conditioned world. In apter on "Phenomenology of the t Liberation," Evola describes the est degree as "that where, while living man, one has completely ved extinction through having anently destroyed . . . the primordial ignorance, thirst, and transcendental intoxications."[54] That is a negative definition. For a positive one, he quotes from a Zen master: "Do not be attached to anything whatsoever: if you understand this, walking or standing, sitting or lying, you will never cease to be in the state of Zen, in the state of contemplation and of illumination."[55] And in this state of ultimate reality, "no one and nothing 'extraordinary' exists in the beyond; only the real exists. Reality is, however, lived in a state in which 'there is no subject of the experience nor any object that is experienced'."[56]

Although Evola and Brunton had no illusions about the rarity of such attainment today, they were more optimistic when taking a wider view of the individual's history. As Evola puts it in his late work, *Ride the Tiger*, "the human condition of earthly existence is only a restricted section in a continuum, in a current that traverses many other states."[57] Brunton says that "other lives, other days, other times, other levels of consciousness already exist just as much as this very moment, even though we do not apprehend them . . . "[58] Readers of René Guénon will recognize the theory of the "multiple states of the being,"[59] which teaches that human life on earth is one of an indefinite number of states

ch, from the point of view of the total g, are co-present. We just happen xperience this one in isolation and er the conditions of time, space, and ality. Given that, it is reasonable to pose that other states preceded our and will follow our death, though in non's system a being cannot manifest e than once in the same state: hence e is no reincarnation on earth.[60]

This remains a bone of contention veen Traditionalists and Theo- ists. Brunton agrees with Theosophy, indeed with most Hindus and dhists, that many earth lives are ssary to develop man's ultimate ntial. He writes ruefully that the is "forced to live among people are mostly several hundred earth- younger than he, and consequently e 'unsympathetic'. . ."[61]

Traditionalists are also un- fortable with the theory of ution. One reason is their antipathy e modern world, seen as the result volution or degeneration compared rlier times. But taking a longer view, ality does not enter into it, and there nd a surprising consensus between wo philosophers. In *The Secret Path*, ished in 1935 with a foreword by Bailey, Brunton mentions that if we back "into the dimmest regions of prehistoric antiquity, we reach a period when man entirely dropped his body of flesh and inhabited an electro-magnetic form, a radiant body of ether."[62] This is Blavatskian anthropology in a scientific guise.

In *Revolt against the Modern World*, published in 1934, Evola also mentions the non-materialized state of early humans: "the absence of human fossils and the sole presence of animal fossils in remotest prehistory may be interpreted to mean that primordial man (if we can call 'man' a type so different from historical humanity) was the last to enter that process of materialization that—after the animals—endowed his first stock, already degenerate, deviant, and mixed with animality, with an organism able to be preserved in the form of fossils."[63] He probably got the idea from his Anthroposophist friends, for Steiner in *Cosmic Memory* writes of how some primordial humans followed the animals in a premature descent from the etheric state, while others remained there longer to develop their spiritual organs, before being the last creatures to acquire physical bodies.[64]

It is surprising to find such ideas in Evola's central work, but for all his antipathy, he cannot be absolved from complicity in the spiritual movement

hed by H. P. Blavatsky. As ioned, his first esoteric ventures with the Roman Theosophists, t was members of that group— independent of the Anglo-Saxon d[65]—who guided him to the study ɔism and Tantra: traditions that the Theosophists had neglected, or, in se of Tantra, misrepresented. Evola , of course, on secondary sources, ly the English translations by Sir Woodroffe, who in correspondence ɔved of Evola's insights. After ng these traditions accessible for rst time in Italian, Evola went on cidate Western traditions such as eticism, alchemy, and the quest e Holy Grail. With the Ur Group e 1920s he experimented with the possibilities of the human being, a guarded respect for Steiner's Kremmerz's methods. If we define Theosophical current not as the w history of the Society but as the nuation of its original impulses, Evola greatly furthered two of hree original objects. And one magine HPB's delight at his and ini's promotion of paganism on ery doorstep of the Vatican![66]

Much the same can be said of on. His early membership of London society soon lapsed, but he always defended Blavatsky: "If H. P. Blavatsky got some things wrong, it is pardonable in a work of vast dimensions. She got many new unfamiliar things amazingly right."[67] In sum, both philosophers continued a globalizing project that did not even begin with Theosophy: that of gathering esoteric wisdom, especially from the non-European world, and interpreting it for the benefit of a nucleus of their own: in Evola's case, what he called the "differentiated man," and in Brunton's case the solitary seekers who found that it answered their needs. As for the third object, gathering the nucleus of a Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, both philosophers had witnessed its futility when even the Theosophists could not stick together.[68]

At this point one naturally thinks of Krishnamurti (1895-1986), who was in the public eye throughout our subjects' adult lives. If anyone was famous for kicking away the cosmic ladder, it was he; and it was generally understood, at least by his admirers, that he had attained the ultimate state. As it happens, no other contemporary received such extensive treatment from both our authors. Evola devotes most of a chapter to Krishnamurti in his book of 1932, *Mask and Face of*

emporary Spirituality, updating it e-editions up to 1971.[69] Brunton, met Krishnamurti at least twice, many notes on the subject.[70] They admire him for his integrity in sing the messianic role that had forced on him, and they make vances for his upbringing. But they the irony that, after denying any for teachers, gurus, systems or tices, he spent his life with all the aratus of a spiritual master leading ccessful sect. Philosophically they ider him sadly deficient. Evola s Krishnamurti's replacement of go with what he calls "Life" a poor titute for what should be eternal invariable.[71] Brunton allows that shnamurti has seen through the ious and mystic illusions—a rare nment—but unfortunately he is finding his way through the third ee and has not finished yet."[72] As he effect on his disciples, Evola as that "It is certainly not a wise ; to propose ideas which are true, if , on the level of the truly 'liberated' eviants who, like modern men, are rom lacking incentives to chaos anarchy."[73] Brunton puts it more ly: "it takes naïve people out the wilderness and leaves them ."[74] Finally, they both associate Krishnamurti's popularity among the post-1968 generation and his rejection of traditional values with student riots and violent demonstrations.[75]

Given Evola's and Brunton's confident exposition of the highest states of human consciousness, we may ask, in conclusion, how it served them through the central crisis of the twentieth century, the Second World War.

After the First World War Evola had shared the hopes of the so-called "Conservative Revolution" and tried to influence both the Fascist and the National Socialist movements in that political direction, with the added motive of spiritualizing their ideas. In the process he became deeply compromised, especially through his infatuation with the subject of race. He put up with Nazism, whose methods and leaders he despised, because it seemed the only weapon against what he saw as the greater evils of Soviet Communism and American democracy. In 1934 he concluded *Revolt against the Modern World* with a double tirade against Russia and America: the former for its proletarian principles and its rule of terror, the latter for its materialism and complacency. Behind both, he says, one can detect the warning signs of the advent of the "Nameless Beast."[76]

vola's wartime exploits have researched and revealed almost o-day by Gianfranco de Turris.[77] ;h point was his presence at the ng between Benito Mussolini :he German High Command in mber 1943. Mussolini had been sed by king Vittorio Emanuele III, soned, rescued with incredible g by Otto Skorzeny, and brought astenburg in East Prussia. The ng was to decide Italy's part in ngoing war, as well as Mussolini's destiny, and Evola, with his cy in German, probably served interpreter. What interests us is on his return to Rome, now under an occupation, he published rticles in a daily newspaper, one Liberation" and the other on the ings of the Tibetan *Book of the* There he writes of how to face ragic upheavals of history, when er religion nor stoical detachment uffice. He compares the situation bad dream, because whatever ens "can only be an episode with ct to something stronger and r, which does not begin with birth nd with death, and can even serve e principle of a superior calm an incomparable, indestructible ity against every trial."[78]

Brunton was in India when England declared war on Germany in 1939, and remained there for the war's duration as a guest of the Maharajah of Mysore. In 1942 he wrote *The Wisdom of the Overself,* whose philosophy of engagement in the world could not ignore the ongoing war. Brunton, too, could write of the philosopher who "practises non-attachment by understanding the transiency of all things,"[79] but he saw the war as much more than an "episode": rather as the effort of malignant forces to block the spiritual evolution of mankind. "This is a war in the heavens as well as on earth."[80]

The difference in attitudes hinges on a difference in how they viewed world history and the destiny of the individual. Evola's framework was the traditional one of the Four Ages, Golden, Silver, Bronze, and Iron, with their Hindu equivalents of the Satya, Treta, Dwapara, and Kali Yugas. By common consent we are now in the last part of the Kali Yuga, in which humanity attains the depth of depravity and materialism. The world itself is heading for catastrophe, which will be succeeded by a new Golden Age and a new cycle of 64,800 years, or whatever duration is assigned to the Yuga cycle.[81]

there is no point in waiting for
The "differentiated man" can
any situation to favor his quest
he Absolute Individual, and war,
e heed the *Bhagavad Gita*, offers the
ortunity for the kshatriya to attain
ation. The rights or wrongs of the
sides are a secondary matter, though
e present case Evola identified the
enemy as materialism. The goals
ommunism, as he had written in
lt against the Modern World, were
total and definitive negation of
supranatural order" and "radical
erialism in every domain."[82] Under
a tyranny even the lower rungs of
spiritual ladder, like religion and
icism, were inaccessible.

Brunton acknowledged the
ence of the yuga cycle, but the
ix for his temporal system was
much longer Theosophical scheme,
dy alluded to by both authors
ne passages I have quoted about
ordial humanity and the descent of
Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine* teaches
humanity as a whole has descended
a spiritual state into materiality,
s now about to reverse the process
return to a spiritual condition, with
dvantage of the experiences thus
ed. Here is a crucial sentence from
Wisdom of the Overself: "The same process which projected the ego from the Overself into that exteriorization of its own consciousness which we believe to be the material world, is now at work to withdraw it again."[83] According to the Theosophical doctrine of cycles this is an inevitable process, but exactly how and when it happens is up to the human race. There can be drastic setbacks to the process, and at the time of his writing one of these was the real possibility of a Nazi or a Communist takeover of Europe. Either of these, as Russia and Germany had already shown, would suppress freedom and crush or pervert all spiritual aspirations. Yet in Brunton's view there was a difference between the totalitarian systems. He writes in a later note that "The dangers to which Nazism exposed the human race were immeasurably larger than those to which Communism exposes it."[84] His reason, briefly, is that Communism at least had a root in sympathy for the underprivileged, whereas Nazism was motivated from the start by hatred and revenge. That said, now that one evil was conquered, the other remained, and neither philosopher had any illusions about Soviet intentions, right up to their deaths—Evola's in 1974, Brunton's in 1981. Both of them thought a third world war extremely likely.[85]

n this paper it may seem unfair
ıave compared Evola's views,
of which were formulated in his
twenties, with Brunton's mature
essions. But that is all we have to go
vola did not write in that idiom in
ater years. He was philosophically
ocious, untaught yet with a mastery
ources that would do credit to a
oral dissertation, plus insights of
g value into transcendent states
onsciousness. All his subsequent
cts rested on that foundation,
so did the choices for which he
eprobated today. As Absolute
idual and illuminated Kshatriya,
a might have said, with Sri Ramana
arshi, that "the sage can watch with
ference the slaughter of millions
ople in battle." Brunton remarks:
t is quite true of the yogi but it
never be true of those who *have*
iced every future nirvanic beatitude to
n to earth until all are saved; they
are entitled to the term sage; nor
hey do otherwise, for they have
d the unity of all human beings."[86]
"PB," as he preferred to be known,
s himself a true companion of the
3" who wrote "To reach Nirvâna's
but to renounce it, is the supreme,
nal step."[87]

Endnotes

1 An abbreviated version of this paper was read at the conference of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism, Amsterdam, July 2-4, 2019.

2 Julius Evola, *The Path of Cinnabar*, translated by Sergio Knipe (n.p.: Integral Tradition Publishing, 2009), 8 [originally published in 1963].

3 Paul Brunton, *The Hidden Teaching beyond Yoga* (London: Rider & Co., 1941), 29.

4 Biographical information on Evola is largely taken from *The Path of Cinnabar*; that on Brunton, from his *Reflections on My Life and Writings* in vol. 8 of his *Notebooks* (Burdett, NY: Larson Publications, 1987), supplemented by Kenneth Thurston Hurst, *Paul Brunton: A Personal View* (Burdett, NY: Larson Publications, 1989). [Kenneth Thurston Hurst was his son.]

5 Thanks to Leslie Price for this information.

6 Paul Brunton, *Notebooks*, vol. 8, 8.

7 Julius Evola and the Ur Group, *Introduction to Magic*, vol. 1, translated by Guido Stucco (Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions, 2001), 167-72.

8 Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 15; see also Julius Evola and the Ur Group, *Introduction to Magic*, vol. 3, translated by Joscelyn Godwin (Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions, forthcoming), part XI.4, "On Drugs."

9 Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 16.

10 Evola, *Path of Cinnabar*, 157-58.

11 Kenneth T. Hurst, *Paul Brunton*, 43-44.

12 Raphael Hurst, "The Two Faces of Man," also entitled "The Mystery of Suffering," *The Occult Review*, May 1922. 286-89. Reprinted in *Paul Brunton, Three Essays and a Poem* (Earlville, NY: Short Path Press, 1989), 8-12. [Raphael Hurst was Paul Brunton's legal name in the 1920s.]

ius Evola, *Teoria dell'individuo assoluto* (Rome: izioni Mediterranee, 1988) [originally blished 1927]; *Fenomenologia dell'individuo oluto* (Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1985) iginally published 1930].

ola, *Fenomenologia*, 173.

nton, *Hidden Teaching*, 382.

ola, *Fenomenologia*, 178.

nton, *Hidden Teaching*, 230.

ohael Hurst, "Two Faces," 1989, 12.

ola, *Fenomenologia*, 233 and n.

ola, *Fenomenologia*, 224.

ola, *Fenomenologia*, 268.

il Brunton, *The Secret Path* (London: Rider & , 1935).

Rudolf Steiner, *How to Know Higher rlds: A Modern Path of Initiation* (Hudson, : Anthroposophic Press, 1994) [originally blished 1908].

nneth T. Hurst, *Paul Brunton*, 55-62.

il Brunton, *A Search in Secret India* (London: ler & Co., 1934), 55-62.

ola, *Cinnabar Path*, 79. See Marco Rossi, "Julius ola and the Independent Theosophical sociation of Rome." Trans. by E. E. nmus, *Theosophical History* VI, No. 3 (July 6): 107–114.

rinted as *Julius Evola, L'individuo e il divenire mondo* (Carmagnola; Arktos/Oggero Editore, 0).

nton, *The Hidden Teaching beyond Yoga*.

la, *Individuo*, 42.

la, *Individuo*, 50.

la, *Individuo*, 56.

la, *Individuo*, 56n.

la, *Fenomenologia*, 263.

34 Evola, *Individuo*, 82.

35 Evola, *Individuo*, 87-88.

36 Paul Brunton, *The Inner Reality* (London: Rider & Co., n.d. [1939]); American edition titled *Discover Yourself* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1939).

37 Paul Brunton, *The Quest of the Overself* (London: Rider & Co., n.d. [[1937]), 296.

38 Brunton, *Quest of the Overself*, 241.

39 Paul Brunton, *The Wisdom of the Overself* (London: Rider & Co., 1943).

40 That is, after Paul Brunton, *The Spiritual Crisis in Man* (London: Rider & Co., 1952).

41 Paul Brunton, *The Notebooks of Paul Brunton*, 16 vols. (Burdett, NY: Larson Publications, 1984-88).

42 Brunton, *Notebooks*, vol. 16, pt. 1, 56, note 176.

43 Brunton, *Notebooks*, vol. 16, pt. 1, 58, note 190.

44 Brunton, *Notebooks*, vol. 16, pt. 1, 109, note 230.

45 Brunton, *Notebooks*, vol. 16, pt. 1, 111, note 257.

46 Brunton, *Notebooks*, vol. 16, pt. 1, 112, note 262.

47 Brunton, *Notebooks*, vol. 16, pt. 1, 155, note 40.

48 Brunton, *Notebooks*, vol. 16, pt. 1, 59, note 198.

49 Brunton, *Notebooks*, vol. 16, pt. 1, 123, note 376.

50 Brunton, *Notebooks*, vol. 16, pt. 1, 81, note 37.

51 Brunton, *Notebooks*, vol. 16, pt. 1, 81, note 39.

52 Brunton, *Notebooks*, vol. 16, pt. 1, 169, note 159.

53 Julius Evola, *The Doctrine of Awakening*, translated by H. E. Musson (London: Luzac & Co., 1951), 273 [original edition 1943].

54 Evola, *Doctrine of Awakening*, 241.

55 Evola, *Doctrine of Awakening*, 288.

56 Julius Evola, *Ride the Tiger*, translated by Joscelyn Godwin and Constance Fontana (Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions, 2003), 126 [original edition 1961].

57 Evola, *Ride the Tiger*, 220.

nton, *Notebooks*, vol. 6, pt. 2, 51, note 163)

René Guénon, *The Multiple States of Being*, nslated by Joscelyn Godwin (Burdett, NY: son Publications, 1984 [original edition 1932].

René Guénon, *Introduction to the Study of du Doctrines*, translated by Marco Pallis ndon: Luzac & Co., 1945), 320-21 [original ion 1930].

nton, *Notebooks*, vol. 16, pt. 1, 132, note 443.

nton, *Secret Path*, 66.

us Evola, *Revolt against the Modern World*, nslated by Guido Stucco (Rochester, Vt.: Inner ditions, 1995), 181, translation corrected from original, *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno*, 2nd (Milan: Fratelli Bocca, 1951), 243.

olf Steiner, *Cosmic Memory*, translated by l E. Zimmer (Hudson, NY: Steinerbooks, 7), 103-104 [original edition 1904].

the positive remarks in Julius Evola, *schera e volto dello spiritualismo contemporaneo* me: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1971), 74 and n.

Julius Evola, *Imperialismo pagano* (Rome: nor, 1928), which drew an angry response n the future pope Paul VI.

nton, *Notebooks*, vol. 11, 168, note 34.

Brunton, *Notebooks*, vol. 11, 171, note 48.

la, *Maschera e volto*, 112-23.

Brunton, *Notebooks*, vol. 10, 147-52, notes 496-

la, *Maschera e volto*, 118.

nton, *Notebooks*, vol. 10, 150, note 511.

la, *Maschera e volto*, 121.

nton, *Notebooks*, vol. 10, 152, note 518.

la, *Maschera e volto*, 121; Brunton, *Notebooks*, 10, 151, note 514.

la, *Revolt against the Modern World*, 356.

77 See Gianfranco de Turris, *Julius Evola: Un Filosofo in guerra 1943-1945* (Milan: Mursia, 2016). Translation by Eric Galati forthcoming (Rochester, Vt.: Inner Traditions).

78 De Turris, *Filosofo in guerra*, 209.

79 Brunton, *Wisdom of the Overself*, 275-76.

80 Brunton, *Wisdom of the Overself*, 254.

81 On this question, see Joscelyn Godwin, "When Does the Kali Yuga End?" *New Dawn* 138 (May-June 2013): 63-68.

82 Evola, *Revolt against the Modern World*, 346-47, translation corrected from *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno*, 446-47.

83 Brunton, *Wisdom of the Overself*, 280.

84 Brunton, *Notebooks*, vol. 7, pt. 2, 47, note 132.

85 See Brunton, *Notebooks*, vol. 7, pt. 2, 94-98, notes 289-317; Evola, *Revolt against the Modern World*, 357.

86 Brunton, *Notebooks*, vol. 10, 143, note 470.

87 H. P. Blavatsky, *The Voice of the Silence* (London: Theosophical Publishing Company, 1889), 44.