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In the Footsteps of Pascal and Kierkegaard:
Ethics and Faith in Wolfgang Koeppen’s Postwar Novels

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Abstract

In focus of this dissertation are the philosophical and Christian dimensions of Wolfgang Koeppen’s postwar novels, *Tauben im Gras* (1951), *Das Treibhaus* (1953), and *Der Tod in Rom* (1954). The author claimed to be neither a philosophical nor a religious writer. Nevertheless, Koeppen raised in his postwar novels fundamental philosophical questions, as well as questions pertaining to the Christian Church and faith. Since the author explicitly identified Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) and Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813-1855) as wise men, this dissertation sets out to answer three pivotal questions: why did Koeppen choose these two religious philosophers as mentors, how does this choice manifest itself in his postwar novels, and what might have been the reason for his preference of Kierkegaard?

The introduction provides a research overview and places the author and his work within postwar Germany, i.e., his time, culture, and postwar literature. Chapter one examines Koeppen’s literary intentions, the means that he utilizes in his trilogy to achieve his goal, and the texts’ existential themes and issues. The propounded existential thoughts and problems serve then as the basis for the following chapters. Chapter two relates Koeppen’s literary objectives and existential ethics to Pascal’s literary intentions and philosophy. The chapter concludes that the French philosopher’s perspicacious understanding of human nature and relations and his uncompromising ethical approach to existence made him a trustworthy guide for Koeppen, who searched for sure ways and means to amend his contemporaries emotional, mental, moral, and spiritual deficiencies. Chapter three briefly discusses the emergence of existentialism and the movement’s impact on the postwar German author and his trilogy. Thereafter, the chapter analyzes the similarities in Koeppen’s and Kierkegaard’s thinking and writing and concludes that the Danish philosopher provided Koeppen with the insight of what it means to be a self and how
to achieve true freedom, which certainly prompted the postwar German author to give Kierkegaard preference over Pascal. Chapter four investigates the themes of Church and faith as they manifest themselves in the trilogy. Since Koeppen portrayed a society that no longer believes in or misconceives Christianity and presented the Catholic Church as a powerful worldly institution whose integrity needs to be questioned, the trilogy’s themes of Church and faith are ambiguous. Nevertheless, chapter four substantiates that Koeppen offered not only ethics but also faith as a potential remedy to his era’s despair and nihilism.

Since the connection between Koeppen’s, Pascal’s, and Kierkegaard’s way of thinking and writing has been largely overlooked, the vast majority of Koeppen researchers ascribed to the author a scornful, misanthropic, fatalistic, and resigned mentality. However, the findings of this study, i.e., Koeppen’s moral and spiritual engagement in society, allow for a new assessment of the postwar German author’s mental disposition.
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Introduction

The focus of my dissertation is the philosophical and Christian dimension of Wolfgang Koeppen’s postwar novels, *Tauben im Gras* (1951), *Das Treibhaus* (1953), and *Der Tod in Rom* (1954), which I regard as central to the trilogy as the author’s socio-political criticism and his modernism. The author claimed to be neither a philosophical nor a religious writer. Nevertheless, Koeppen raised in his postwar novels fundamental philosophical questions, as well as questions pertaining to the Christian Church and faith. Since the author explicitly identified Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) and Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813-1855) as wise men, I set out to answer three questions in my dissertation: why did Koeppen choose these two religious philosophers as mentors, how does this choice manifest itself in his postwar novels, and what might have been the reason for his preference of Kierkegaard?¹

Studies that examine the trilogy’s philosophical and religious elements are the exception. Many researchers have interpreted the postwar novels as *Zeit-, Gesellschafts-,* and *Künstlerromane* that describe and respond to concrete socio-political events, conjure the *Zeitgeist* of the nineteen fifties, and reflect upon the role of postwar art. Numerous researchers have noted the trilogy’s modernism and discussed the texts’ formalistic aspects in detail. Yet, the postwar novels’ inherent existential-philosophical and existential-theological discourses have been mainly overlooked.

For a long time, Koeppen research could be divided into two diverging main categories, the formalistic and the socio-political approach. Already in the 1960s, Helmut Heißenbüttel analyzed Koeppen’s trilogy under the aspect of modernism. This approach has been carried on in the 1970s by Ernst-Peter Wieckenberg and in the 1980s by Norbert Altenhofer, Hans-Ulrich Treichel, and Martin Hielscher. In focus were the peculiarities of Koeppen’s writing style, the subjectivity of narrator and narrative, the novels’ inherent literary tradition – the Avantgarde –, and the self-reflectivity of the novels. Hielscher’s *Zitierte Moderne* and Hans-Ulrich Treichel’s *Fragment ohne Ende* are especially noteworthy.

Hielscher convincingly interpreted the trilogy as a continuation of modernist writing and as a comment on the tradition of the experimental modern novel, with a focus on the so-called *Romankrise*. He viewed the postwar novels as *Literaturromane* that question the role of art and the artist. However, the trilogy is extremely complex in its various layers of meaning and it is my contention that the novels’ inherent literary discourse is only one layer within the trilogy’s strata of significance.

Treichel, on the other hand, took a linguistic turn and analyzed Koeppen’s works from a post-structuralist perspective. Treichel presented language as a power that is subject to external forces, i.e., culture, traditions, and politics. Further, he elucidated that the author, the artfully created world of the text, and the subject status of the characters are threatened by language that resists the writer’s domination. Treichel maintained that
the impending slipping of language from the author’s control that Koeppen experiences while he is writing articulates and manifests itself in his rhythmic-musical prose and in the content of the narrative. He concludes that this uncontrollability of language is responsible for Koeppen’s literary silence. However, my dissertation is based on my contention that Koeppen expressed in his postwar trilogy everything he felt obliged to say about the human condition and the pitfalls of human existence and, therefore, left it at that. I hope that my discussion of Koeppen’s existential ethics will satisfactorily buttress my assumption.

Manfred Koch and Dietrich Erlach initiated in the 1970s the socio-political categorization of Koeppen’s postwar novels. They examined the trilogy in respect to Gegenwortskritik and Gegenwartsbewältigung and provided for the first time ample biographic information about the author. In the 1980s, advocates of the socio-political approach have been Hartmut Buchholz, Felicia Letsch, Richard Landon Gunn, and Karl-Heinz Goetze. The works of Thomas Richner and Carole Hanbidge have expanded the socio-critical framework through their existential-psychological examination of Koeppen’s trilogy.

Richner, who restricted his analysis to Der Tod in Rom, was the first to discuss religious matters and to examine the influence of Pascal’s and Kierkegaard’s philosophy on Koeppen. In the first half of his study, Richner analyzed the characters’ psychological motives and concentrated on existential-philosophical issues, i.e., the search for the truth,

2 In the late 1950s, Koeppen turned from the novel to travelogues. After Nach Rußland und anderswohin (1958), Amerikafahrt (1959), and Reisen nach Frankreich (1961), the author wrote for fifteen years only newspaper articles, book reviews, prefaces, epilogues, portraits, and essays provoked countless speculations. The time from 1959 to 1976, the year in which his semi-autobiography Jugend was released, was interpreted by many people as Koeppen’s literary silence.

3 In focus of Koch’s and Erlach’s analyses were the Federal Republic’s nationalism, militarism, restoration, rearmament, capitalism, the petit bourgeoisie, and the heritage of fascism.
humanity’s condition, and the senselessness of existence. In the second half of his analysis, he discussed Koeppen’s affiliation to Pascal and Kierkegaard. Unfortunately, he focused exclusively on Pascal’s and Kierkegaard’s faith and disregarded otherwise important aspects of their existential ethics.

According to Richner, Koeppen is caught in an anthropocentric and egocentric concept of the world but wants to make the leap into faith and plays with the idea of becoming a religious writer. I disagree with Richner in this point. Asked about his relationship to God, Koeppen stated:


As Hilda Schauer noticed, Richner came to the conclusion that “Koeppens Figuren nur die Entscheidung treffen können, zwischen Glauben und Verzweiflung zu wählen,” but she argued that “diese die Möglichkeit haben, verschiedene dominante Werte zu vertreten, von denen nur einer der Glaube ist” (14). I agree with Schauer’s assessment. Although Koeppen was a believer and concerned with religious questions, I maintain that he offered faith only as one possible way of life to give one’s existence meaning. Hence,
Richner’s inquiry left me with an essential question: besides Pascal’s and Kierkegaard’s steadfast faith in God, what might have caused Koeppen to call them wise men?

Like Richner, Hanbidge focused on the inner state of the trilogy’s characters and argued that “the common emphasis of Koeppen’s novels is to be sought not in the outer life of the time, but in the inner lives of the individuals they feature” (9). She explored the portrayed inner self of the characters and the narrator’s concern with their displayed qualities. She concluded that the restrictions that the protagonists have to endure stem from forces that do not accommodate the exceptional individual but the norm. Like Hanbidge, I examine Koeppen’s portrayal of his characters’ selves. Yet, rather than leaving my discussion at the description of their psychological state, I will deduct from their displayed qualities the author’s perceptions of self and freedom.

In the course of the years, researchers became increasingly aware that one-sided analyses undermined the complexity of Koeppen’s trilogy. On the one hand, experts who had interpreted the novels from a purely theoretical modernist perspective had failed to give proper credit to Koeppen’s thematic engagement with the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, and postwar Germany. On the other hand, researchers who had focused on Koeppen’s social, cultural, and political engagement, had often failed to accredit relevance to the trilogy’s formalistic aspects. From the mid-80s on, researchers recognized this lacuna and devoted their analysis to both the formalistic aspects and the thematic content of the trilogy. Among the first experts who examined the postwar novels from both perspectives, from a socio-political and modernist vantage point, was Bernhard Uske.
From the 1990s on research amplified thematically. For example, Christi Brink-Friederici analyzed the correlation between the trilogy and the city. She demonstrated how this sphere, once “Ort der persönlichen Freiheit des Menschen,” turns into a pandemonium that threatens human existence (40). She argued that the city’s \textit{Wertezerfall} is reflected in the novels’ style and structure. David Basker searched for a common thread that runs through Koeppen’s prose and maintained that the common denominator of the author’s narrative vision is his perception of chaos and the wish to dictate some personal, cultural, or political order. Gerhard Pinzhoffer analyzed Koeppen’s visual depiction of Rome and illuminated the importance of Rome’s visual depiction to the thematic content. Further, Lothar Veit sketched the role of the writer in Koeppen’s postwar novels and traced the author’s self-conception as a writer as expressed in his trilogy. Josef Quack’s, Simon Ward’s, and Hilda Schauer’s studies are especially noteworthy.

Quack analyzed Koeppen’s literary works with a focus on the experience of time and linked Koeppen’s socio-political critique of time with the subjectivity of the author’s narratives. Further, he examined the texts’ so-called mythological and literary “Echoraum” and maintained that Koeppen’s extensive use of intertextual references serves the revision and validation of literary traditions (199). Likewise, he examined the novels’ philosophical intertextuality and argued that Koeppen is more indebted to the thoughts of Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Jaspers, and Sartre than earlier assumed (8). Moreover, he interpreted the trilogy as a literary discourse on existentialism (213). For the most part, I agree with Quack’s assessment and argue, based on my own findings, that Koeppen revised and validated not only literary traditions but also traditional
philosophical and Christian concepts. Quack’s study was the missing cue for my exploration of the trilogy’s philosophical dimension. While Richner’s analysis sparked my interest in the trilogy’s theological aspects, Quack’s study provided me with the incentive to investigate not only the religious but also the philosophical dimension of the trilogy and to search for similarities in Koeppen’s, Pascal’s, and Kierkegaard’s way of thinking and writing.

Simon Ward explored the modernist concept of the artist as detached observer. His analysis centered on the construction of self and the outsider status of Koeppen’s protagonists, who situate themselves on the margin of the society in their search for relative autonomy. He read the protagonists as variations of an aesthetic existence that seeks to circumvent instrumentalization by the society. Like Quack, Ward perceived Koeppen’s allusions and citations as “literary transformation and recontextualization of the original source,” but he argued “that Koeppen’s discourse is literary and not philosophical” (12). However, throughout history, philosophical thought had an undeniable impact on literary movements. Moreover, the common denominator of philosophy and literature is the two disciplines’ study of the human condition and existence. While the former discipline conveyed its findings predominantly in abstract theories, the latter prefers a poetic form of expression.\(^5\) It is my contention that Koeppen’s postwar novels’ inherent literary and philosophical discourses do not exclude one another but supplement each other and conjoin to a profounder contemplation of existential issues within the narrative.

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\(^5\) Existentialists, such as Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Albert Camus, preferred a poetic form of expression.
Hilda Schauer analyzed Koeppen’s depiction of value systems and the conflict between traditional-bourgeois and modern thought. She elucidated that conformist, conservative, and idealizing traditionalism collides in the trilogy with nonconformist, self-reflective, skeptical, and uncompromising modern thought. Schauer argued that Koeppen questions in his postwar novels the ideals of humanism, such as free will and choice, and humanity’s progress through the power of reason. I agree with her assessment. Yet, rather than discussing Koeppen’s break with traditionalism from an exclusively literary vantage point, I will bring the author’s revision of traditional norms, values, and conventions into a philosophical and socio-political context.

As the brief overview of former research has shown, Koeppen’s trilogy is extremely complex in its various layers of meaning and significance. It is neither my intention to render the socio-political content of Koeppen’s postwar novels irrelevant nor is it my objective to question the relevance of formalistic studies. Without a doubt, his era’s defects sparked Koeppen’s objection, and he expressed his concerns in a modernist style that mirrors the confusion of his time and manifests the opaque connectedness of seemingly random events and people’s disposition. Nonetheless, a study with a focus on the trilogy’s philosophical and religious components reveals most clearly Koeppen’s concern with the fundamental aspects that affect, drive, and define human beings. In addition, it is my contention that an analysis from a philosophical and religious vantage point is able to tie up the loose ends of socio-political and formalistic studies. To illuminate the intersection and junction of these areas of studies, Koeppen and his work needs to be placed, of course, within postwar Germany, i.e., his time, culture, and postwar literature.
The literary context

Immediately after Germany’s defeat, writers asked themselves how they could contribute to the healing process of the nation. The collapse of the Third Reich had caused an ideological gap, the literary field was wide open, and there was a need and a chance to renew and redefine the role and function of German literature. However, the political ideologies of the allies affected Germany’s development to a large degree. East Germany passed through a socialist formation process and the West was re-educated in a pronounced democratic and bourgeois fashion, which eventually resulted in two distinct German literatures. “In the East,” as Stephen Brockmann points out, “proponents of politicized socialist realism held sway” and in “the West the dominant perspective among cultural elites was that . . . art in general and literature in particular should be free and independent of contamination of politics” (161). While the East welcomed the politically tuned German authors of the outer emigration, the West withdrew in the immediate postwar years from politics and rather turned to apolitical authors of the inner emigration, as well as to new talents.

Already established West German writers of the inner emigration, such as Elizabeth Langgässer (Das unauslöschliche Siegel, 1946, and Märkische Argonautenfahrt, 1950), Herman Kasack (Die Stadt hinter dem Strom, 1947), and Hans Carossa (Ungleiche Welten, 1951), continued after the war the Christian-conservative tradition or they subscribed to a worldly spirituality. In contrast, the generation of young writers in West Germany that started publishing after 1945, in particular authors associated with the Gruppe 47, such as Hans Werner Richter, Alfred Andersch,
Wolfdietrich Schnurre, Heinrich Böll, Martin Walser, Ilse Aichinger, Ingeborg Bachmann, Günter Eich, Uwe Johnson, and Günter Grass, felt that a radical new beginning was required. In order to separate themselves from the older generation of writers that they thought to be corrupted by Nazi ideology, the young generation proclaimed the *Kahlschlag* ideology of the Zero Hour. They assessed the past and present spiritual inwardness of writers of the inner emigration as *Weltflucht* and demanded a new matter-of-fact, skeptical literature that casts off any ideological elements and linguistic embellishments and realistically records life as it is. However, corresponding to the Federal Republic’s political trend, restoration prevailed initially over innovation. By the 1950s, writers of the inner emigration occupied the preeminent position in West-German postwar literature.

In “Werkstattgespräch,” an interview with Horst Bienek, Wolfgang Koeppen expressed that he neither believed in the *Stunde Null* nor subscribed to conservative traditionalism and aestheticism:

Bei uns tut man gern so, als ob mit jedem Debütanten die Literatur neu beginnen müsse. Es gibt eine Tradition! Aber sie ist anders, als unsere Traditionalisten sie sich vorstellen. Die neue Tradition ist international.

He turned to the experimental works of modernists, such as John Dos Passos (*Manhattan Transfer*, 1929), Marcel Proust (*In search of Lost Time*, 1906), James Joyce (*Ulysses*, 1922), and others.

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6 Some of the writers who called themselves the young generation, such as Andersch and Richter, were already in their early and late thirties.

7 Although not affiliated with the Gruppe 47, exemplary for the literature of war experiences, homecoming soldiers, and the rubble that emerged in the immediate postwar years was Wolfgang Borchert. He described in his short stories, such as “Das Brot,” “Nachts schlafen die Ratten doch,” and “Die Küchenuhr,” as well as in his radio play and drama *Draußen vor der Tür* (1947), human alienation, anxiety, and despair in a postwar world that is not only physically but also mentally and emotionally reduced to rubble.

8 The interview was first published in the journal *Merkur* 16.172 (1962): 568-575. For a reproduction of this interview see Treichel *Einer der schreibt* 22.
1922), and Alfred Döblin (Berlin Alexanderplatz, 1929). In particular, Koeppen’s first and third postwar novels exemplify his employment of the literary Avantgarde’s narrative techniques, such as fragmentation, montage, simultaneity, multi-perspectivism, association, and interior monologue.

Tauben im Gras narrates the events of one day in 1951 in an occupied German city, most likely Munich. In a succession of more than one hundred narrative sequences, the internal and external world of approximately thirty characters zooms in a cinematic manner in and out of focus. Their lives cross, but the characters neither develop deep relationships nor enter into profound dialogues. They remain self-absorbed, isolated, and alienated. The scenes constantly change in perspective and location, which disrupts the narrative flow and requires from the reader a very close reading of the text. Many of the described events take place simultaneously and are assessed from a different angle by another character, which exposes the characters’ illusions, deceptions, or otherwise hidden defects. Inner monologues reveal the characters’ thoughts most clearly. The narrator comments on what is happening in the inner and outer world of the characters and, thus, controls the point of view. However, the distinction between the narrative voice and the characters’ perspective is often blurred by the use of free indirect speech. It is not always clear to the reader who is speaking. Italicized newspaper headlines, political catch phrases, songs, and advertisement slogans are embedded in the text and lend the narrative authenticity. However, a myriad of mythological, Christian, historical, and literary allusions are integrated in the text as well, a feature that rather points towards the “Verfahrensweise der klassischen Moderne” than to the literary Avantgarde (Becker 63).
The setting of Das Treibhaus is Bonn. In contrast to Tauben im Gras, the second postwar novel narrates in a chronological and linear fashion the events of two days in 1953. The novel is divided into five chapters and focuses on the perspective of only one character, the protagonist. However, it seems that the book’s division into chapters is simply a matter of form and not pertinent to the novel’s content. Like in Tauben im Gras, mythological, Christian, historical, and literary references are prominent features of the text and, once again, italicized passages are embedded in the novel. Yet, in contrast to the often authentic newspaper headlines of the first novel, the italicized parts of the text seem to be “die – schriftliche – Gedankenwelt” of the protagonist (Hielscher 90). A narrative voice comments on the main character’s inner thoughts and external events, but it is often very difficult to distinguish between this voice and the protagonist’s perspective. Therefore, it is possible to interpret Das Treibhaus as one extended inner monolog and “Alle Personen, deren Handlungen und Motive” as the main character’s “Projektionen” (Hielscher 99).

The last postwar novel, Der Tod in Rom, takes place in 1954 in Italy’s capital and narrates in a chronological fashion the events of two days. The book is divided into two lengthy chapters that correspond to day one and two of the narrative. However, Koeppen reverts to the multi-linear, episodic, and fragmented narrative structure of Tauben im Gras. Scenes shift in perspective and location, but the narrative concentrates on fewer characters, has a coherent storyline, and proceeds more smoothly. No italicized passages interrupt the narrative flow, yet the artistic play with mythological, Christian, and historical elements and literary references is still maintained. One salient shift in the narrative perspective occurs. The narrator retreats at times and allows the protagonist to
take over the narrative. Thus, the narrative shifts back and forth from the first-person perspective to the third-person perspective.

The trilogy’s experimental formalistic features are paralleled by Koeppen’s experimental style. Traditional syntax and punctuation often times yield to run-on sentences that stretch over pages, strings of words packed with associations, and sentences that break off in the middle to be continued in another context in the next or another scene. However, the language is eloquent, figurative, and rich with adjectives and, thus, defies the reduction postulate of the young generation. Sabina Becker summarizes the fundamental difference between Koeppen and the writers of the young generation as follows: The author


The majority of early critics, with a few exceptions, lauded Koeppen’s style and acknowledged his formalistic skills but took offence at the trilogy’s content, i.e., the author’s unsettling criticism of postwar society and politics.

For example, Hans Schwab-Felisch held Koeppen’s description of his era’s defects against him and complained that Tauben im Gras lacks an uplifting ideology:

Weil dieses Buch sich fast ausschließlich im Morbidem, im Sumpfe tummelt, weil es außer seiner Analyse dieser Gegebenheiten keine Kraft aufweist, weil sein
Pessimismus keine substantielle Größe hat – darum mangelt es ihm auch an . . .
der Überzeugungskraft, die es hätte ausstrahlen können, wäre es nur von einer
höheren Warte aus geschrieben worden.  

Likewise, Fritz René Allemann, who reviewed *Das Treibhaus*, failed to notice that the
author’s artistic transformation of reality revealed the truth behind his era’s flaws more
conscientiously than any factual report and, thus, scolded:

Der Dichter, der es unternimmt ein Stück Wirklichkeit darzustellen . . .
durchdringt seinen Stoff – nicht um an ihm kleben zu bleiben, sondern um durch
ihn hindurch zu dem zu dringen, was Koeppen vielleicht mit der gestelzten Phrase
von der »Dimension« seiner Aussagen meint. Dem Literaten freilich mag es
genügen in 48 Stunden Impressionen zu sammeln, die er dann als wackelige
Staffage benützt . . . Mit Wahrheit aber hat das dann nichts zu tun – nicht mit der
vordergründigen des gewissenhaften Berichterstatters und schon gar nicht mit der
. . . schöpferischen Imagination.  

Paul Hühnerfeld also missed affirmative elements in *Der Tod in Rome*:

Die einstmals an Erich Kästner gerichtete Frage . . . »Herr Kästner, wo bleibt
denn das Positive?« hat, auf Koeppen gemünzt, eine Berechtigung; ohne das
geringste Positivum abgestützt, verlieren seine Negativa an Wert.  

Likewise, Erich Franzen, who passionately commended Koeppen’s lyrical style, missed

in *Der Tod in Rom* a clear-cut perspective:

9 Schwab-Felisch’s review was first published in the journal *Der Monat*, 4.40 (1952): 38-44. For a
reproduction of this article see Greiner 38.

10 Fritz René Allemann’s review was first published in the journal *Der Monat*, 6.67 (1954): 81-85. For a
reproduction of this article see Greiner 62.

11 Paul Hühnerfeld’s review was first published in the newspaper *Die Zeit*, 4 Nov. 1954. For a reproduction
of this article see Greiner 71.
Mühelos wie windgetriebene Wellen eilen seine Sätze dahin, die Worte sprühen auf wie schimmernde Gischt, und über dem Ganzen liegt ein herber, heilsamer Salzgeruch. Erquickt . . . läßt man sich über verborgene Tiefen ins Weite tragen, aber dann beginnt das Auge nach einem abschließenden Horizont zu suchen, und es findet ihn nicht.\textsuperscript{12}

In short, the aforementioned critics favored the ivory-tower mentality of conservative traditionalists and their “onkelhafte[] Gartenlaubenarmlosigkeit,” as Karl Korn, one of Koeppen’s early supporters, once formulated it.\textsuperscript{13}

Seemingly in contrast to the uplifting, appeasing, and humanistic stance of conservative postwar writers, Koeppen revealed both a discomforting outer and inner reality and spoke of his contemporaries’ helplessness, alienation, despair, nihilism, and existential fears in the light of a haunting past and a daunting present. He disclosed the older generation’s unwillingness to accept responsibility for the recent past, the young generation’s emotional and mental scars left by the Third Reich, and the Federal Republic’s then present defects. Many postwar writers, among them the young Heinrich Böll (\textit{Wo warst du, Adam?}, 1951), depicted Germans as victims of the war without further questioning what had given rise to the war. In contrast, Koeppen disclosed in his postwar novels as contributing factors people’s lack of skepticism and moral deliberation, docility and conformism, and personal interests and motives. Böll, for example, sided in \textit{Und sagte kein einziges Wort} (1953) and \textit{Haus ohne Hüter} (1954) with the petit-bourgeoisie and affirmed the simple morality of common people, which led to the novels’

\textsuperscript{12} Erich Franzen’s review was first published in the newspaper \textit{Süddeutsche Zeitung}, 13 Oct. 1954. For a reproduction of this article see Greiner 67.

\textsuperscript{13} Karl Korn’s review was first published in the newspaper \textit{Frankfurter Allgemeine}, 10 Nov. 1951. For a reproduction of this article see Greiner 47.
immediate popularity. People identified readily with Böll’s upright everyday heroes. In contrast, Koeppen not only doubted the integrity of common people but also questioned the soundness of Germany’s elite, which certainly incensed many intellectuals. In addition, his dysfunctional, despairing, and even resigning anti-heroes confounded the readers’ identification with Koeppen’s main characters. And last but not least, Koeppen’s fusion of art and socio-political criticism was without a doubt a thorn in the side of conservative aesthetes and traditionalist. However, this fusion marked a turning point in postwar literature.

In short, Koeppen’s trilogy helped pave the way for a nonconformist, socially engaged, and politically aware literature that clearly emerged in the year 1959 with the publication of Heinrich Böll’s *Billiard um halbzehn*, Günter Grass’ *Die Blechtrommel*, and Uwe Johnson’s *Mutmaßungen über Jakob*.

The socio-political context

Without a doubt, Germany’s defeat, the country’s occupation and re-education by the allies, the nation’s division into East and West, the outbreak of the Cold War, the menace of newly invented nuclear-weapons, West-Germany’s remilitarization debates, unemployment, poverty, housing shortage, the black market, and the currency reform were distressing outer factors that affected the inner condition of Germans immensely and caught Koeppen’s critical attention. In the preface to his first postwar novel, the author sketched the socio-political situation of the early nineteen fifties as follows:

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14 Schauer writes: “Da die politische Problematik in den längeren Werken der Autoren der Gruppe 47 erst Mitte der 50er Jahre eine wichtige Rolle zu spielen began, bildeten Koeppens Romane in dieser Hinsicht künstlerische Orientierung” (10).
»Tauben im Gras« wurde kurz nach der Währungsreform geschrieben, als das deutsche Wirtschaftswunder im Westen aufging, als die ersten Kinos, die ersten neuen Versicherungspaläste die Trümmer und die Behelfsläden überragten, zur hohen Zeit der Besatzungsmächte, als Korea und Persien die Welt ängstigten und die Wirtschaftswundersonne vielleicht gleich wieder im Osten blutig untergehen würde. . . [V]iel Bedarf war nachzuholen, der Bauch war endlich zu füllen, der Kopf war von Hunger und Bombenknall noch etwas wirr, und alle Sinne suchten nach Lust, vielleicht bevor der dritte Weltkrieg kam (GW 2: 9).

As the narrator of Tauben im Gras points out,

man lebte im Spannungsfeld, östliche Welt, westliche Welt, man lebte an der Nahtstelle, vielleicht an der Bruchstelle, die Zeit war kostbar, sie war eine Atempause auf dem Schlachtfeld, und man hatte noch nicht richtig Atem geholt, wieder wurde gerüstet . . .(GW 2: 11).

The novel’s italicized newspaper headlines report “Atomversuche in Neu-Mexiko” and “Atomfabriken im Ural” that pose a serious threat to all life forms on earth (GW 2: 11).

Yet, the first chancellor of the Federal Republic, Konrad Adenauer, objected to West-Germany’s “Neutralisierung” and demanded a “Wehrbeitrag,” which sealed, as many Germans feared, the country’s division for many years to come (GW 2: 12). Despite these alarming political circumstances, as the narrator states, postwar magazines thrived on the memories of courageous soldiers, supposedly innocent Nazi supporters, and the duped civilian population (GW 2: 12). However, Koeppen condoned neither a glorification of war nor a minimization of its consequences but espoused a radically realistic portrayal of his time. He incorporated in his novel not only disconcerting external facts but also his
contemporaries’ inner upheaval, such as “die Ratlosigkeit der Staatenlenker, die Bestürzung der Gelehrten, die Angst der Menschheit,” and “die Glaubenslosigkeit der Theologen” (GW 2: 219).

On the one hand, the characters in Tauben im Gras are defined by their repression of distressing memories, thoughts, and feelings, their lack of introspection and moral deliberation, and their passive waiting for better times to come, which leads them either to boredom or to a frantic pursuit of pleasure. Superficial literature, trivial movies, alcohol abuse, and sexual activities facilitate their flight from reality. On the other hand, more reflective characters experience feelings of helplessness, disorientation, alienation, guilt, anxiety, and despair. For example, the novel’s protagonist, Philipp, a middle-aged German writer, wants to be an acclaimed author but despair and nihilism mangle his perception and keep him from bringing pen to paper. In any case, common to all characters is their more or less desperate search for some happiness and stability.

Likewise, Das Treibhaus responds to actual events. Adenauer’s westernization, democratization, restoration, and remilitarization policies, as well as the return of former national-socialists to public offices were subject to the author’s criticism. In addition, the Federal Republic’s rising nationalism, materialism, and capitalism found Koeppen’s disapproval. In contrast to Tauben im Gras, the political situation in Das Treibhaus has leveled off and the economy has made steady progress. However, as Koeppen indicated, the inner condition of his contemporaries has not changed, “die Menschen waren natürlich dieselben geblieben, sie dachten gar nicht daran, andere zu werden, weil die Regierungsform wechselte” (GW 2: 232). Thus, the initial hope of many intellectuals
after Germany’s defeat for a radical new beginning “scheiterte wieder mal . . . an dem zähen Schlick des Untergrundes, der . . . alles im alten stecken ließ (GW 2: 232).

The novel narrates the last two days of Felix Keetenheuve, a member of the opposition in the German Bundestag. His wife has just passed away, which causes him to evaluate his personal and political life. All in all, the middle-aged intellectual is disappointed with himself and the political development of the newly-founded Federal Republic of Germany. He recognizes with much regret that he had neglected his wife and contributed to her early death. The politician sees through the dubious power maneuvers of politics and disapproves of the government’s restoration politics and the forthcoming remilitarization of the Federal Republic. Unfortunately, he feels incapable of changing things for the better. Since Keetenheuve lacks the inner strength to act upon his moral ideals, he escapes from the unpleasant reality of the political world into the appeasing ivory tower of poetry. Eventually, the squeamish intellectual yields to despair and nihilism. Convinced of the pointlessness of both his personal life and his political activities, Keetenheuve commits suicide.

*Der Tod in Rom* criticizes, like *Tauben im Gras* and *Das Treibhaus*, concrete socio-political circumstances. As the matter stands, West Germany’s restoration is almost completed. Militarism and nationalism have gained momentum and former Nazis fill respected positions. Adenauer’s westernization politics shows results: the sovereignty of West-Germany approaches – the accession of the Federal Republic into NATO took place in 1955 – and the country’s remilitarization is sealed. As Koeppen ironically formulates it, the “deutschen Bürger hatten sich wiedergefunden” and are, once more, “feine Leute” (GW 2: 408-09). Yet, underneath this façade, as the author indicates, the
inner condition of his contemporaries is still in a sorry emotional, mental, and moral state.

To reveal the truth about his contemporaries’ inner condition, the author tells the story of two branches of one German family that meet in Rome. The family’s older generation unrepentantly upholds either openly or in a covert manner the ideology of the Third Reich. The former SS-general Gottlieb Judejahn and his wife Elke, a devout but deranged national-socialist, resolutely believe in the old Nazi ideals and show no sign of remorse. On the other hand, Friedrich Wilhelm Pfaffrath and his wife Anna hide their Nazi mentality from themselves and others. Pfaffrath, former “Führergeldsverwalter” and present Lord Mayor, desires an untainted public image and, thus, fancies that he was just a passive bystander and not complicit in the Holocaust (GW 2: 477). The young members of the family suffer the consequences of being conditioned by Nazi ideology from childhood on; all of them have attended an *Ordensburg*, a military school for future Nazi leaders. Nevertheless, as Koeppen suggests, “die Teilhaberschaft an der Schuld war jedem Überlebendem aufgebürdet” (GW 2: 487). Dietrich, the younger son of the Pfaffraths, who had always admired his uncle Judejahn’s enormous prestige, is blinded by his own lust for power and has turned into a rigid conformist and ambitious opportunist. Siegfried, his older brother, is the protagonist of the novel and stands for the young generation of Germans who wish to free themselves from guilt. Full of moral resentment, Siegfried holds the older generation responsible for the immoral course of the Third Reich and rigorously turns his back on his family. However, the protagonist himself is a former member of the Wehrmacht and had spent some time in a war prison camp. In other words, Siegfried had conducted military operations during the Third Reich
and had been part of the chain of command. After Germany’s defeat, the disillusioned and guilt-ridden young composer believes, like many of his contemporaries, in nothing and no one. Nonetheless, Siegfried finds an outlet for his frustration, anger, and despair in his dissonant twelve-tone music that clearly expresses his inner strife. In contrast, Siegfried’s cousin, Adolf Judejahn, has turned to God in hope for consolation. The young priest, who stands for the West-German revival of Christianity, hopes to bring his family members to their senses so that they realize their sins and seek atonement.

Without a doubt, Koeppen brought in his postwar novels perturbing socio-political issues into sharp focus and contested with his radical realism, unpleasant candor, and innovative aesthetics the ivory-tower mentality of conservative traditionalists that dominated the literary postwar scene. However, it is my contention that the postwar author was equally concerned about the inner condition of the German public, in particular the paralyzing despair and demoralizing nihilism of young and middle-aged intellectuals, the backbone of Germany’s then unknown future.

The existential philosophical and religious context

In the abovementioned “Werkstattgespräch” (1962) with Horst Bienek, Koeppen admitted that his first postwar novel was “die Folge eines aufgestauten, eines zu spät verwirklichten Stilexperimentes” (22). Nonetheless, he asserted:

Ich bin überzeugt, daß man heute auch ohne die Wegmarke Joyce in seine Richtung gehen müßte. Dieser Stil entspricht unserem Empfinden, unserem
In other words, the modernist idea to live in a complex, inscrutable world in which the
individual feels unstable, isolated, alienated, disoriented, and threatened was, most likely
as a result of the war and perturbing postwar events, crucial to Koeppen. The behavior
and attitude of the trilogy’s characters provide ample evidence for this *Welt- und Zeitempfinden*,
which is the point of intersection where the literary, socio-political, and
existential-philosophical aspects of the trilogy cross and join.

The postwar novels’ form – the highly complex structure and avant-guardistic
narrative techniques – corresponds not only to the confusion of Koeppen’s time but also
to the intricate interconnectedness of seemingly random happenings and people’s past
and present disposition. Furthermore, the modernist *Welt- und Zeitempfinden*
transformed, in the light of two devastating world wars, paralyzing totalitarianism, the
horrible holocaust, and the menacing invention of the atom bomb into a widespread
nihilistic world view, the belief of many intellectuals that life is absurd and nothing has a
meaning, neither moral values nor life. To make matters worse, the political postwar
situation – West Germany’s restoration policies and the Cold War – compounded the
worries, fears, and nihilism of German intellectuals. However, the majority of Germany’s
cultural elite regarded nihilism to be dangerous and destructive (Brockmann 208). Some
of them approached the problem by turning to existential philosophy as put forward by
the German philosophers Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers and the French philosopher
Jean Paul Sartre (Brockmann 210). Others preferred the traditional route and returned to
Christianity. Wolfgang Koeppen neither embraced existential nihilism nor blindly
conformed, as many of his contemporaries, to Christianity. He rather turned in his search for steadfast values and positive role models to Pascal’s and Kierkegaard’s theocentric existential philosophy and, thus, drew simultaneously from two respected western traditions, philosophy and Christianity.

The rationale of this study

As already mentioned above, I have found the works of Thomas Richner and Josef Quack especially worthwhile and intend to expand upon their findings. For the most part, I agree with Quack who interprets the trilogy as a literary discourse on existentialism. It is correct that Koeppen alludes in his trilogy to the philosophical thought of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860). For example, the homosexual Siegfried deliberates in *Der Tod in Rom* on “die Lebensgier, zu der wir verdammt sind, die Fortpflanzungssucht, die noch den Ärmsten betört,” and regards this will-to-life and desire to propagate “unheimlich” and “eklig” (*GW* 2: 493). Likewise, the postwar author refers to existential-philosophical concepts that were propounded by Heidegger and Sartre. For instance, Koeppen explicitly refers in *Tauben im Gras* to Heidegger’s concept of *Geworfensein* into existence, Kierkegaard’s concept of anxiety, and Sartre’s concept of nausea by means of Emilia’s stream of consciousness (*GW* 2: 35). However, the writings of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) have been tremendously influenced by Kierkegaard. Since Koeppen explicitly negated in an interview with Richner that Heidegger and Sartre had a significant influence on his perception of existence, I focus on the philosophical thought of Kierkegaard, who is often
called the founder or father of existentialism. In addition, I support the argument of Richner, who maintained:

In seinem Ringen um existentielle Klarheit setzt sich Wolfgang Koeppen vornehmlich mit zwei Philosophen auseinander, deren Einfluß unverkennbar ist: Blaise Pascal, den er einmal „den Weisen meines Anfangs” genannt hat und mit Sören Aybe Kierkegaard, dem „Weisen seines Lebens” (105).

Both aforementioned researchers recognized that the trilogy’s themes of disorientation, estrangement, despair, and anxiety have something in common with Pascal’s and Kierkegaard’s perception of existence. Yet, neither Richner nor Quack explained the two philosophers’ body of thought nor used their existential ethics as an interpretive guide. The task of my dissertation will be to fill this lacuna.

In chapter one I will provide a general overview. That is to say, I will analyze Koeppen’s literary intentions, the means that he utilizes in his postwar novels to achieve his goal, and the trilogy’s existential themes and issues. The propounded existential thoughts and problems will serve then as the basis for chapter two and three. In chapter two, I will relate Koeppen’s literary purpose and existential ethics to Pascal’s literary objective and ethical body of thought as expressed in the French philosopher’s Provincial Letters and Pensées. In chapter three, I will link Koeppen’s literary intentions and the trilogy’s existential subject matter to Kierkegaard’s literary task and philosophy. In chapter four, I will discuss Koeppen’s critical stance towards the Church and faith as it manifests itself in his postwar novels.

Chapter One: Taking Stock

Koeppen’s search for the truth and the essence of life

In his preface to *Tauben im Gras*, Koeppen remarks that he espoused a description of the “Urgrund” of his time and that he filtered life in his heart “um die geheime, mit Balsam und Gift erfüllte Essenz herauszuziehen” (*GW* 2: 9). It is significant for further discussion that the author refers to the heart as a cleansing or purifying agent that is capable of exposing the essential, even though secret, aspects of life, which are bitter-sweet, good and evil. A similar statement can be found in Koeppen’s essay “Die elenden Skribenten:”

Der Skribent . . . richtet seinen Blick ins Leere oder ins Schwarze oder Helle, und sein Blick . . . dringt ins Herz, und er sieht im Herzen der Menschen die Wahrheit, die Süße und die Bitternis des Lebens, sein Geheimnis, seine Angst, seinen Schmerz, seinen Mut (*GW* 5: 231).

Again, the author points to the dichotomy of life, its sweetness and bitterness, and ascribes to the human heart an essential aptitude: the heart is not only able to intuit the most vital parts of life but also comprises its essence and harbors the truth. Already in these two statements, Blaise Pascal’s belief in humanity’s dual nature and the heart’s cognitive ability that play an important role in Koeppen’s trilogy reveals it presence. I will expand upon this observation at a later point.

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16 I interpret what the author calls the “Urgrund” as the fundamental aspects that affect, motivate, and define human beings per se.
Koeppen’s search for the truth and the essence of life are indeed philosophical undertakings. From the very beginning of the discipline, philosophy attempted to define truth, asked what it means to be human, and undertook to make sense of human existence. However, Koeppen did not attempt a construction of a universal, abstract, and purely rational philosophical system to open his contemporaries’ eyes in the hope of mending their evident emotional, mental, and moral shortcomings. He rather discussed, like Kierkegaard, existential and ethical issues within a fictional narrative and posed by means of his trilogy timeless fundamental philosophical questions that were also pertinent to Pascal’s and Kierkegaard’s philosophy: What does it mean to be human? When we, i.e., human beings, try to make our world intelligible, should we rely on reason or intuition? Is absolute truth and objective knowledge accessible to us? What is the truth anyway? Moreover, how do we contribute to our existence, and who or what gives our existence meaning? Are our choices, decisions, and actions the result of inevitable fate or do we freely determine our lives? And, to what extent are we responsible for our actions?

A subjective approach

In his preface to *Das Treibhaus*, Koeppen assures his readers that the novel’s dimension transcends concerns of the present, “Die Dimension aller Aussagen des Buches liegt jenseits der Bezüge von Menschen, Organisationen und Geschehnissen unserer Gegenwart,” and adds that the novel possesses its very own “poetische Wahrheit.” (*GW* 2: 222). In “Mein Tag ist ein großer Roman” (1972), an interview with
Christian Lindner, Koeppen maintains further that a writer has to search for his own truth, for “die Wirklichkeit seines Sehens, um töricht zu hoffen, sehen zu machen”\(^\text{17}\) The author alludes in both instances to the multiplicity or subjectivity of truth, which negates by implication an all-encompassing objective truth. Like Kierkegaard, Koeppen preferred a poetic and individual subjectivity over a systematic and theoretical method that claims objectivity and exclusively applies rational criteria to access and define truth.\(^\text{18}\) Generally speaking, rationalism appeals to reason and does not take feelings and emotions into account, which are essential for the human conscience. Thus, inquiries that exclude people’s sensitive faculties might appeal to the intellect but touch neither people’s conscience nor heart nor soul.

Koeppen recognized the limits of theoretical and generalizing system-based inquiries and indicated at various points in his trilogy that the essence of a specific human being cannot be grasped by purely rational, abstract concepts. For example, in *Tauben im Gras*, Frahm, a surgeon and gynecologist who frequently performs abortions, states that abstract knowledge cannot solve the moral dilemma of his métier. He is bound by the Hippocratic Oath never to harm anyone and to do his best for the good of his patient. However, some of his patients would end their own lives without his medical intervention. Thus, he complains: “Hippokrates? er sollte mal zu mir kommen und sich’s anhören »ich bring mich um« – »wenn Sie’s Herr Doktor nicht machen« – »ich will’s

\(^{17}\) For the reproduction of this interview see Treichel *Einer der schreibt* 78.

\(^{18}\) Systematic, rational thought has a long tradition in Western philosophy. In the classical antiquity, Plato (428-348 BC) advocated mathematical logic as model for philosophical thought (Rockmore 15). Likewise, René Descartes (1596-1650) applied mathematical principles to develop a philosophical system of knowledge to replace speculative philosophy (Cottingham, introduction, 18). Similarly, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), emphasized reason and “strongly insisted on system as the criterion of science, hence on scientific philosophy” (Rockmore, preface, xix). Nevertheless, already Aristotle (384-322 BC) recognized the limits of rational, system-based philosophy and pointed out that the single concrete individual cannot be adequately situated within a concept (Stack 153).
wegen habe und zu wissen wo sie dann hingehe, die Pfuschaborte, sterben zu Tausenden . . .” (GW 2: 64). Moreover, the physician suggests that modern science, the “Formelkram” and “Gehirnakrobatik” of biologists and physicists, disembodies humans and reduces them to abstract beings (GW 2: 64). Hence, he laments that “ein Leib ist kein Leib mehr” (GW 2: 64). In contrast, Schnakenbach, a former schoolmaster, subscribes to an abstract and abstruse formula of existence. He regards his self and life as “Ich denkende Zusammensetzung chemischer Kräfte” (GW 2: 180). Moreover, Schnakenbach views the world as a microcosm, which is filled with a myriad of minuscule but powerful units that burst continuously and disappear into space (GW 2: 204). According to his micro-physical concept of the world, human life is just an accumulation of these power units, blown like sand into a mold that humans call the self (GW 2: 215). Schnakenbach’s therapist, Dr. Behude, rates his patient’s interpretation of life as nonsense but gets to the heart of the problem: “Wir kennen uns weder im Kleinen noch im Großen aus, wir sind nicht mehr zu Hause in dieser Welt” (GW 2: 215).

As Koeppen implies, modern natural sciences analyze the components and mechanisms of the physical world but ignore the particularity of the single human being and disregard matters of the conscience, which govern a person’s moral thoughts and

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19 In a similar vein, Siegfried, the protagonist of Der Tod in Rom, notes “die Arroganz der Physiker in den Laboratorien” and argues that “ihre phantasielose Klugheit zertrümmert die natürliche Welt” (GW 2: 539).

20 It is my contention that Koeppen ironically refers with the schoolmaster’s self-perception as “I-thinking compound” to Descartes and his famous cogito ergo sum. In his sixth Meditation, Descartes concluded that the ‘I’ is neither person nor human body but the thinking mind” (Solomon, From Hegel to Existentialism 11). Koeppen’s “I” transcends the “I-thinking mind.” The author acknowledges the vital interplay of body, mind, heart, and soul that culminates in the individual’s choices, which constitute a person’s distinctive character and essence. Hence, he emphasizes the individual’s thinking, feeling, and acting “I.”

21 As Quack points out, the discoveries of atomic physics and bio-chemistry, the idea of an exploding microcosm and an infinite universe, shook the traditional concept of life, the soul, and the self and led to feelings of disorientation and estrangement from the world (135). I will elaborate on Koeppen’s critical stance toward twentieth-century science in the following chapter.
behavior. Consequently, he chooses a literary genre as a platform for a highly intellectual, philosophical, and, nevertheless, deeply personal discourse. Through the depiction of characters with distinct mental and emotional dispositions and behavioral patterns, Koeppen captures what escapes generalizing scientific inquiries, i.e., the condition and performance of particular human beings, and stimulates his readership’s sensitive faculties by his characters’ tales of woe and their, more or less, questionable moral attitude.

The author’s objective

Without a doubt, Koeppen rendered in his trilogy a desolate account of his contemporaries’ morals, but it is my contention that he was not only a sharp critic but also a compassionate writer. That is to say, he comprehended his contemporaries’ state of mind, their moral shortcomings and emotional suffering, and hoped, by means of his trilogy, to amend their cognitive and emotional powers. Koeppen’s upsetting description of West-Germany’s socio-political postwar climate; his portrayal of somewhat dysfunctional, despairing, and even resigning main characters; his presentation of history as a recurring cycle of human violence and suffering; and the absence of easily recognizable solutions all evoked his contemporaries’ objections and led to a negative assessment of the author’s attitude. However, it is my contention that Koeppen believed that neither an emphasis on humanity’s positive characteristics and achievements nor a

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22 That is not to say that our present-day natural sciences ignore ethics or lack moral standards.
23 Already Aristoteles regarded the ability “als erkennender Geist tätig zu sein” as the ultimate purpose of a human being and argued that there is a connection between literature and philosophy (Gigon 8). According to the Greek philosopher, the aim of both disciplines is people’s recognition of the truth (Gigon 8).
presentation of ready-made solutions to his era’s problems would stimulate critical thinking and self-reflectivity as much as his jolting ex negativo didactic, reflective irony, and puzzling intertextual references.

In “Zur Resignation neige ich sehr,” an interview with Ekkehart Rudolph, Koeppen admits a pessimistic tendency but denies a cynical or nihilistic standpoint and insists: “ich resigniere nicht.”24 In a similar vein, the author argues in “Mein Zuhause waren die großen Städte,” an interview with Gunnar Müller-Waldeck: “Ich resigniere nicht. Vielleicht resigniert ein Mensch in meinen Büchern. Ich tröste ihn nicht. Ich finde man soll das Leben in dieser Welt aushalten bis zum Ende. Kein Happy-End.”25 Yet, asked by Christian Lindner in regard to the function of his writing, “Läuft nicht letzten Endes alles auf eine Beschreibung der Ohnmacht hinaus?,” Koeppen answers: “Es gilt, die Ohnmacht so zu schildern, daß der Ohnmächtige aufsteht.”26 Based on the connotations of the word “Ohnmacht,” the author’s statement can be interpreted in two ways. First, it is important to describe ignorance in a way so that an unreflective person gains consciousness. Second, it is crucial to portray powerlessness in a way so that a person who formerly felt deprived of power becomes aware of his or her capabilities. As I will show, both interpretations apply to Koeppen’s trilogy and demonstrate the author’s hope to amend with his writings his contemporaries’ unwholesome disposition. Moreover, as I will discuss in chapter two and three, Koeppen’s two-fold objective aligns with Pascal’s and Kierkegaard’s literary intentions.

24 The interview was broadcasted by Süddeutscher Rundfunk, Stuttgart, 24 Sept. 1971. For a reproduction of this interview see Treichel Einer der schreibt 49.
25 The interview was published in Deutsche Zeitung/Christ und Welt, 24 Sept. 1971. For a reproduction of this interview see Treichel Einer der schreibt 263.
26 For a reproduction of Lindner’s interview “Mein Tag ist mein Großer Roman” see Treichel Einer der schreibt 81.
When I maintain that Koeppen was a compassionate writer, I argue that the author neither pitied his contemporaries nor absolved them from guilt and accountability for their past, present, or future moral shortcomings and wrongdoings. He rather suggests in *Der Tod in Rom* that “die Schuld am Bau des Weges, der zum Unheil führte” and “die Teilhaberschaft an der Schuld war jedem Lebenden aufgebürdet” (*GW* 2: 486-87). Nevertheless, Koeppen explicitly stated in “Ich habe nichts gegen Babylon,” an interview with Jean-Paul Mauranges: “Ich betrachte . . . die Welt um mich herum nicht kalt, sondern mitführend.”27 In other words, he empathized with the mental and moral crises of his German contemporaries. However, familiar with Pascal’s and Kierkegaard’s philosophical thoughts, Koeppen knew that veracious self-reflectivity and self-awareness are crucial propaedeutics to self-improvement, and that self-transformation is only possible if an individual becomes conscious of his or her deviance from an ideal and acts upon this insight. Hence, it is all-important to the author to bring about his reader’s contemplation and truthful assessment of his or her mental and moral condition and behavior. Considering the Nazi era’s moral bankruptcy and the subsequent mental and moral crisis of postwar German intellectuals, Koeppen’s own search for steadfast values and dependable role models is self-explanatory.

Unsound Zeitgeister

Unfortunately, the majority of Germans preferred after World War II to blind themselves and went on with their lives with little or even no reflection about their past

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27 The interview was first published by Jean-Paul Mauranges in *Wolfgang Koeppen: Littérature sans frontières*. For a reproduction of this interview see Treichel *Einer der schreibt* 126.
and present conduct. Many people simply longed for the fulfillment of their immediate needs and desires after years of hardship and followed the maxim “Vergeben und Vergessen,” as the author indicates in Der Tod in Rom (GW 2: 408). They embraced a hedonistic lifestyle, followed their impulses, lived in the moment, and found comfort in the economic miracle and the rising, though embryonic, power and esteem of the newly founded Federal Republic.

In contrast, many intellectuals were aghast. They wondered how it had come to be that a seemingly enlightened and moral nation had committed such barbaric crimes against humanity. A phenomenon that followed the Third Reich’s horrendous immorality was a widespread nihilism. This position–life is absurd and nothing has a meaning, neither life per se nor moral values–compounded the mental crisis of Germany’s intelligentsia. The dawn of the Cold War, the restoration and remilitarization politics of West-Germany, and the nation’s, more or less, subliminal fascist disposition intensified their dilemma. Consequently, doubts, distress, and hopelessness were not uncommon among postwar German thinkers.

Koeppen recognized that the situation was bleak but not hopeless. He was aware of the power of the pen and knew, as follows from his Büchnerpreisrede (1962), that it is important “zu sprechen, zu agieren, zu wirken, die Mitmenschen zu erregen, sie zu bewegen, wenn es gegeben ist, sie auch zu erfreuen, und, wenn es sein muß, sie zu ärüern” (GW 5: 253-54). Further, in the article “Nach neun Jahren” (1983), Koeppen, the first and former Stadtschreiber von Bergen, explained:

Ich glaube an das Buch. Nicht nur, weil lesen schön ist. Wer viel liest, hört zu. Er vernimmt etwas. Er unterrichtet sich. Er empfängt die eine und die andere Ansicht
On the one hand, to fight his contemporaries’ complacency, indifference, or thoughtlessness, Koeppen raised in his trilogy inconvenient and painful questions to awaken people’s minds, to provoke doubts, and to sharpen their mental perceptions and moral conscience. On the other hand, concerned about the distress of the German intelligentsia, he searched for means to shake them out of their paralyzing mode of despondency and nihilism.28

Consequently, Koeppen addresses in his trilogy a readership that might have lost, in one way or another, what he considered to be a proper perspective. He neither directly instructs his readers nor explicitly offers solutions. He rather displays, via his characters, a variety of negative and positive human dispositions and behavior. Mental and moral poverty are juxtaposed against reflectivity and ethics. Ruthless ambition and heartless indifference are contrasted with cordiality and compassion. Exaggerated intellectualism and cold rationalism collide with prudence and passion. Blind materialism opposes spirituality, and superficiality conflicts with profundity. In addition, he facilitates the reader’s conceptual recognition by means of narratorial comments, irony, and mythological, historical, and literary references.29 Examples of positive human attributes are rare, which speaks for the author’s negative assessment of his contemporaries’ inner condition. Nonetheless, Koeppen hopes that his readers will reflect upon these different

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28 The trilogy’s protagonists provide ample evidence for the mental and moral crisis of German intellectuals.
29 Likewise, Quack recognizes the catalytic function of Koeppen’s narrators. He points out that their comments are not prescriptive but rather “Maßnahmen einer konzentrierten Darstellung, die das Erlebnis der Einzelpersonen begrifflich resümierend zusammenfaßt” (124).
points of view, recognize themselves within the moral spectrum, re-evaluate their conduct, and become concerned with their own shortcomings and wrongdoings.

Unfortunately, as the narrator of Tauben im Gras signals, people hate the truth: “Die Leute wollten nicht ihre Sorgen, nicht ihre Furcht, nicht ihren Alltag, sie wollten ihr Elend nicht gespiegelt sehen” (GW 2: 14). They shun reality, do not like to be reminded of their unhappiness, and wish to forget the “Härte des Leben und Lebenskampf” (GW 2: 34). In addition, as the narrator of Das Treibhaus imparts to the reader, many people tend to hide their flaws and lack true remorse about their bad conduct:

Nun lebt ein Hang der Entblößung in vielen Menschen, . . . und so traten einige vor und klagten sich vieler eitel schlechter Gedanken an, die sie nie gedacht hatten, während sie sich ängstlich hüteten, daß die Schlangen aus ihnen sprachen, das Giftgewürm, das wirklich in ihrer Brust nistete. Die schlechten Taten blieben ungebeichtet (GW 2: 344).

Nonetheless, by implying that only “ein entwickelter, ein scharfer, ein zarter Sinn für Gut und Böse” is able to define what “sittlich oder unsittlich” means, the narrator of Das Treibhaus concedes that moral matters are not easily verifiable, and that one needs a highly perceptive and sensitive conscience to define good and bad deeds (GW 2: 344).

For the sake of argument, it has to be said that the Nazis and their supporters firmly believed that their cause was good and right. They had a code of conduct and values and conscientiously adhered to their belief system. Even after the war, many national-socialists unwaveringly believed in the righteousness of their cause and ignored the immorality of their ideological convictions. The prime example for the Nazis’ morally detestable mentality and conduct is Gottlieb Judejahn in Der Tod in Rom.
However, Koeppen indicates at various points in his trilogy that true and unshakable ethics, to say the least, preserve people’s dignity, freedom, and life.

Moreover, postwar Germany’s moral dilemma had its ironic facet, which Koeppen captured in his trilogy. As the fictitious SS-General Judejahn exemplifies, inveterate Nazis still strongly believed after the war in their principles and showed great determination. In contrast, many perplexed postwar intellectuals, like the trilogy’s protagonists, lacked resolution because of their skepticism towards moral values and paralyzing nihilism.\(^3^0\) I will expand on this problem in short.

Koeppen’s use of imagery, irony, and literary allusions

To facilitate his readers’ recognition of morally dubious attributes or to reveal the degree of a character’s dehumanization, Koeppen often utilizes animal imagery.\(^3^1\) For example, when the narrator of Das Treibhaus ironically asserts, “die Tauben [waren] nicht so unschuldig, wie sie girnten,” he reflects people’s pretense of innocence and their actual deceitfulness most clearly (GW 2: 233). Likewise, when the narrator of Der Tod in Rom ironically states, “Man verbarg den Bock,” he casts people’s concealment of their animalistic, sinful, and evil aspects into bright light (GW 2: 408). The biblical connotation of these figures of speech—the dove stands for purity, peace, and good, the goat symbolizes sinfulness, condemnation, and evil—amplifies the narrators’ statements. Despite people’s tendency to conceal their flaws, Koeppen hopes that his readers will face the truth about themselves. As the narrator of Tauben im Gras puts it: “Ich führe

\(^3^0\) In a similar vein, Gunn argues: “It is a climate of extreme pessimism in which Koeppen shows the believers to be fascists and the non-fascists unable to believe in anything” (182).

\(^3^1\) In chapter three, I will expand on Koeppen’s use of animal imagery.
The author’s allusion to Caliban, a character in Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest*, is puzzling and another example of Koeppen’s use of reflective irony—in this case it is actually a blend of irony and a literary allusion—as a strategy to heighten his readers’ moral consciousness. As a simple ironic figure of speech that means the opposite of what has been said, the message is clear. The addressed person, that is to say the postwar German reader, should be ashamed of his or her appalling behavior. Yet, the allusion to Shakespeare’s Caliban might still perplex the addressee. In this case, the reader has to think harder and most likely searches for clues inside and outside of the text to decipher its meaning, which is a necessity that applies to many of Koeppen’s enigmatic literary references.

In Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest*, Caliban is described as a wicked, gross, primitive, and immoral being without a conscience. Thus, he acts on a purely instinctive level. In a similar vein, Hilda Schauer interprets Caliban as “bewußtseinsdumpfen, triebgesteuerten Rohstoff des Lebens, der auch die wilden Kräfte der Natur versinnbildlicht” (209). What Koeppen certainly hoped to impart with the aforementioned narratorial comment is that humans have a conscience. While animalistic desirers determine the actions of the conscienceless Caliban, human beings are capable of self-reflection and moral deliberation. They are free to choose their course of action and, as a consequence, are accountable for their behavior. In short, the addressed postwar reader should be ashamed of his or her past and present unethical conduct. However, as
the trilogy’s protagonists clearly demonstrate, shame, guilt, despair, and nihilism might have a debilitating effect.

*Tauben im Gras*: Philipp’s paralyzing nihilism and despair

As Philipp’s psychiatrist reveals, the protagonist suffers from “Pseudoangina pectoris,” i.e., an imagined heart disease (*GW* 2: 46). Yet, it is not an oxygen-deprived, cramping heart muscle that causes him discomfort but the lack or suppression of vital feelings and emotions.

Litt er Wenn er an die Toten dachte, an die toten Stätten, die verscharrten Gefährten? Nein. Die Empfindung versteifte sich, . . . die Vorstellung war irgendwie pompös, traurig, abscheulich, . . . vor allem war sie langweilig (*GW* 2: 22).

As the quote demonstrates, Philipp lacks sensibility and his conscience is deficient. Like many of Koeppen’s contemporaries, the protagonist turns away from the past and lacks profound feelings of shame, guilt, and regret in regard to Germany’s recent history. He mainly feels sorry for himself. His literary debut “war im Lautsprecherbrüllen und im Waffenlärm untergegangen, war von den Schreien der Mörder und Gemordeten übertönt worden, und Philipp war wie gelähmt, und seine Stimme war wie erstickt” (*GW* 2: 101). Since confusion and debilitating nihilism triumph in Philipp’s mind over well-considerate reflection, he struggles with life.

As the narrator of *Tauben im Gras* states, “Philipp kam mit der Zeit nicht zurecht” (*GW* 2: 21). He cannot think clearly and views humanity as “schwankendes
Menschenmal” in an ungovernable “Zeitsee” from which arises “ein gefrorenes, nichttssagendes, dem Gelächter schon überantwortetes Bild” (GW 2: 23). Although the middle-aged protagonist feels a professional calling, he stays idle. He does not even try to do something (GW 2: 141). The despondent writer is “auf den Holzwegen,” helplessly entangled in Heidegger’s existential philosophy (GW 2: 35).

Hans-Ulrich Treichel characterizes the protagonist’s personal perception of life and his existence as “entleert, bar jeder Hoffnung und jeder sinnstiftenden Handlungsmöglichkeit” (Fragment ohne Ende 81). Indeed, instead of rendering an account of his time and his individual concerns, which could give his existence meaning and moral substance, Philipp is paralyzed by the alleged absurdity and pointlessness of human endeavor. Moreover, as the following quote demonstrates, he feels superfluous and subject to fate: “Er hatte den Leuten, die draußen vorübergingen, nichts zu sagen. Die Leute waren verurteilt. Er war verurteilt. . . Die Zeit hatte diesen Ort verurteilt. . . Er war überflüssig” (GW 2: 56).

Schauer maintains that guilt feelings cause Philipp’s literary paralysis: “Er findet sich schuldig, weil er während der Diktatur . . . politisch und moralisch versagt hat” (45). Philipp is aware of his past moral negligence and admits: “[M]ir schlug die Stunde nicht, ich drückte mich durch die Diktatur, ich haßte aber leise, ich haßte aber in meiner Kammer . . .” (GW 2: 147). However, this awareness ought to be a moral incentive for Philipp to give an account of his present concerns. Unfortunately, he belongs to the German postwar authors who sit “auf den Trümmern Karthagos und weinen” (GW 2: 52). Treichel argues further that the self-reflective and critical Philipp “repräsentiert die Möglichkeit einer ‘authentischen’ Existenz . . ., die einen – wenn auch unvollkommenen

32 Holzwege is a philosophical work by Martin Heidegger, published in 1950.
– Gegenentwurf darstellt zu einem Leben, das sich in den Fixierungen sozialer Rollen und Klischees zu verlieren droht” (84). Unfortunately, this genuine and substantial existence remains only a possibility and is not actualized. The protagonist seems to forget that life needs to be lived and not theorized. He loses himself in fears and worries and gives up hope: “Philipp hatte sich der Verzweiflung hingegeben, einer Sünde. Das Schicksal hatte ihn in die Enge getrieben” (GW 2: 17). However, as the narrator remarks, surrender to despair is condemnable. Too much intellect and theoretical thought and not enough belief in one’s abilities and capability, which leads to irresolution and passiveness, seem to be the problem here.³³

Das Treibhaus: the protagonist’s self-destructive despair

In a similar vein, the narrator of Das Treibhaus states that the politician Felix Keetenheuve “bewältigte das Dasein nicht” (GW 2: 227). Like Philipp, Keetenheuve lost sight of reality: “Er zerdachte die Welt, die ihn trug” (GW 2: 324). As Treichel puts it, the world and his own person fall apart under his intellectual and critical look (85). The protagonist negates any palliation of the truth, as horrid it might be, and advocates “der Gorgo ins Gesicht zu sehen,” but he eventually despairs when his ideals collide with actuality (GW 2: 315). Appalled by the dubious power maneuvers of postwar politics, he laments: “Es gibt hier überhaupt keine Wahrheit. Nur Knäuel von Lügen” (GW 2: 302). The demoralized “Gewissensmensch” goes astray in the labyrinth of politics, shuns reality, and flees into the aesthetic world of poetry (GW 2: 223).

³³ Philipp’s aforementioned entanglement in philosophical concepts indicates that philosophical theories rather confuse people. Generally speaking, philosophy conceptualizes life and does not provide the individual with concrete and practical advice how one can manage one’s own life.
Obviously disheartened by doubts, skepticism, and hopelessness, Keetenheuve resigns and, thus, neglects his responsibility to fight with all his might for human rights (GW 2: 241). The narrator defines him as “Mimosengewächs,” as a person who drowns at times “in ästhetisch wehmütigen Gefühlen” and self-pity (GW 2: 284). Moreover, he is described as “Mephistopheles des guten Willens” (GW 2: 288). Koeppen alludes with this phrase to Goethe’s drama Faust and to the demon Mephistopheles, the “Geist der stets verneint” and “stets das Böse will” (1336-38). By means of the literary reference, the narrator implies that Keetenheuve is a yes-man who has good intentions but brings about ill by sanctioning everything. This notion is reinforced in another passage. Keetenheuve reflects upon his own attitude—“immer abseits, immer duldend, nie kämpfend”—and asks himself if he is not the root of all evil (GW 2: 277). Although he knows that “abseits bleiben” and to nurse “die täuschende Unschuld” is not enough, he is convinced of the futility of his intervention (GW 2: 276-77). He assumes that nobody is listening to him, and that “Worte von sich zu geben, wenn man nicht überzeugt war, einen Weg weisen zu können” makes no sense (GW 2: 370).

Schauer explains: “Unter den gegebenen politischen Umständen sieht Keetenheuve keine Möglichkeit für die Verwirklichung der Freiheit und der Menschenrechte, und so zweifelt er an seinen Fähigkeiten, in der Politik wirksam zu werden, die Welt zu verändern” (116). Yet, Keetenheuve ignores his valuable ability to stir minds and to challenge conventional notions. It might be that his political power is limited, but other politicians are afraid of him (GW 2: 278). The “Bazillus der Unruhe” forgets that he is a necessary nuisance, because he forces others to think (GW 2: 223). He overlooks that his surrender has dire consequences for a humanity that needs a clear-
headed and energetic advocate of human rights who persistently fights against the violation of people’s dignity, life, and freedom:

Die geschundenen Krieger auf den Schlachtfeldern, die geplagten Völker waren die Opfer zänkischer, überaus eigensinniger, rechthaberischer und gänzlich unfähiger Denker, die in ihrem verdrehten armen Kopf keine Klarheit schaffen konnten . . . ” (GW 2: 275).

The narrator’s moral appeal is explicit in respect to human belligerence. He agrees with Keetenheuve, who regards humanity’s belief in violence as a solution to its problems as “ältestes Übel der Menschheit” (GW 2: 364). Consequently, he cautions: “Wohl dem, der da nicht mitmachte! Noch wohler dem, der Halt gebot!” (GW 2: 275). Yet, Keetenheuve is a dreamer and does not act upon his moral conviction:

[E]r hatte wieder nur geträumt . . . und sich nicht aufgerafft, er hatte gedacht anstatt zu handeln, es war ewig das alte Lied. . . . Vor jeder Lebensaufgabe versagte er. Er hatte neunzehnhundertdreunddreißig versagt und neunzehnhundertfünfundvierzig versagt. Er hatte in der Politik versagt (GW 2: 227).34

The author’s reference to Prometheus, the tireless advocate of humanity, in the moment of Keetenheuve’s suicide is informative. If one considers Greek and Roman mythology as a poetic expression of ancient existential concerns, Koeppen’s mythological references turn out to be fruitful means to emphasize humanity’s age-old and perpetual problems. Likewise, Hanbidge argues that the author’s employment of classical archetypes not only enhances the significance of present events but also expands

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34 Koeppen’s critical stance towards dreamers resurfaces in Der Tod in Rom, when the narrator remarks: “Nichts ist erreicht, wenn man in den Wolken schwebt” (GW 2: 479).
the temporal dimension of the text and stresses the timelessness of the conflict in question (112). In other words, Koeppen’s allusion to Prometheus in the moment of Keetenheuve’s fatal jump off the bridge not only illuminates the politician’s failure to master life but also humanity’s immemorial struggle with evil and moral issues.

According to the myth, Prometheus is indirectly responsible for the evil that was brought into the world of humans (“Prometheus” 168). The creation of Pandora and her calamitous box was a punishment for Prometheus, who ignored Zeus’s commandment, created humans, and stole fire from the heavens to keep them warm. Fortunately, the goddess could close the box that unleashed evil into the world before hope could escape. As the myth elucidates, there is not only evil in the world but also hope.

The name Prometheus further evokes in a literarily educated German reader Goethe’s poem “Prometheus” that elucidates the subject matter. In the poem, Prometheus comments on shattered dreams and mocks Zeus:

Wähntest du etwa,
Ich sollte das Leben hassen,
In Wüsten fliehen,

In a similar vein, Herwig maintains that the “Zusammenspiel von Mythos und Geschichtsdeutung geht über die ästhetische Umformung des Zeitgeschehens hinaus; mit der Einbettung der unmittelbaren Nachkriegereignisse in eine überzeitliche, allegorische Dimension sprengt Koeppen die Grenzen des Zeitromans” (62) Likewise, Treichel argues that Koeppen’s poetic employment of myths and mythological elements expands the “Gegenstand der Erzählung gewissermaßen ins Unendliche” and “zerreißt den Horizont der historischen Aktualität und gibt den Blick frei auf eine Dimension der Zeit, die weit in die Geschichte zurück - und vielleicht auch über sie hinausreicht . . .” (97).

The question how evil and affliction came into the world puzzled humanity from the very beginning. While the pre-Christian myth blames external forces, the Christian concept of original sin emphasizes humanity’s inherited depravity. Koeppen reveals specific inner and outer forces that are capable of impinging on a person’s conduct.

Since the dichotomy of humanity’s conduct is one of Koeppen’s themes, it is interesting that Prometheus’ behavior is benevolent and fatal at the same time. When he stole the fire, it was in the interest of humanity. However, his deed increased human affliction. Also Pandora is simultaneously good and evil. By opening the box, she caused unintentionally humanity’s calamity but made sure that humans did not have to live without hope.
Weil nicht alle Knabenmorgen-
Blütenträume reiften? (Goethe, “Prometheus,” 191).

By means of the evocation of Prometheus’ legend and Goethe’s poem, Koeppen points out that the wish for an absolute peaceful world is laudable but unrealistic. Evil, that is to say, morally bad and wrong behavior is the negative part of human life. The author concedes that world is full of hardship and affliction, but he suggests neither to hate life nor to give up hope when reality shatters some of his contemporaries’ unreasonable and idealistic dreams. Likewise, it becomes clear that impetuous actions may possibly cause human suffering, despite good intentions. Thus, I maintain that the protagonist’s suicide is neither, as Erlach argues, “ein Akt des rigerosesten Moralismus” (184) nor, as Hanbidge asserts, the triumph of Keetenheuve’s ethical integrity over an immoral political machinery (197). Since Koeppen voices in his interview with Müller-Waldeck that one should endure life (263), no matter how troublesome it may be, I agree with Quack, who interprets the main character’s suicide as liberation of the burden of existence (187).

*Der Tod in Rom*: the protagonist’s shame, guilt, despair, and nihilism

Like his fictional predecessors, Philipp and Keetenheuve, Siegfried Pfaffrath is willing to face the bare truth, even if it petrifies him: “Es ist die Sage, daß man zu Stein wird, wenn man die Wahrheit sieht. Ich möchte das entschleierte Bild sehen, selbst wenn ich zur Säule erstarre” (*GW* 2: 546). Koeppen refers with Siegfried’s statement to the biblical story of Sodom and to Schiller’s “Das verschleierte Bild zu Sais.” According to
the Bible, Lot’s wife, who witnessed God’s destruction of Sodom, turned into a pillar of salt. The biblical narrative alludes to the horrifying consequences of human sinfulness and wickedness. In Schiller’s poem, a young man wishes to unveil a painting or statue that reveals the truth. Yet, he is warned by a hierophant not to do so, because it is forbidden and the truth wears heavily on a guilty person’s conscience. Blinded by his zeal for knowledge, the eager young man disobeys and suffers the consequences of grief that lead to his early death. Schiller’s warning is clear: “Weh dem, der zu der Wahrheit geht durch Schuld! / Sie wird ihm nimmermehr erfreulich sein” (Echtermeyer, “Das verschleiert Bild zu Sais,” 267). By means of the intertextual references, Koeppen reminds the reader of humanity’s ageless wickedness and violence. He indicates further that impulsive actions have consequences and emphasizes the burden of a guilty conscience, which explains Siegfried’s anguish.

As the protagonist of Der Tod in Rom illustrates, overpowering feelings of shame and guilt possibly lead to the disbelief in one’s abilities. Siegfried, a former member of the German Wehrmacht, is appalled and ashamed about the Nazis’ ferocious persecution and annihilation of the Jews. During a dinner with Ilse Kürenberg, a Jewish acquaintance who barely escaped Nazi persecution, he imagines tasting the ashes of incinerated Jewish victims in his mouth. Full of despair, he thinks: “Das ist geschehen geschehen geschehen das ist nicht zu ändern nicht zu ändern das ist verdammt verdammt verdammt verdammt” (GW 2: 435). Conflicting feelings about his homosexual and pedophilic inclination add to his inner strife. Convinced of his depravity, Siegfried compares himself with Caliban (GW 2: 518). He ponders: “Es wäre wohl vernünftig, an mich zu glauben, aber ich kann nicht an mich glauben, auch wenn ich es manchmal versuche, ich schäme mich dann . . .”

38 The story of Sodom’s destruction is told in Genesis (18:16-19:29).
(GW 2: 495). Since shame drags him down and discourages him, he wishes, like many of Koeppen’s contemporaries, to free his conscience from these feelings (GW 2: 505). Yet, the protagonist seems to forget that a sense of shame or guilt, caused by an individual’s shortcomings or wrong-doings, speaks also for the well-being of his conscience and the existence of moral values. Thus, the embarrassing awareness that he failed to apply moral principles in the past should rather be an incentive to apply moral principles in the present and future.

Nevertheless, Siegfried is the most promising of Koeppen’s protagonists. He is conscious of his own and his society’s past and present immorality, fights against external forces that threaten to undermine his freedom, and searches for a way of life that suits him. With his symphony, the young composer is able to render an account of his time and individual concerns. However, as the conductor’s spouse, Ilse Kürenberg, points out, his music expresses “Zerfahrenes und Hoffnungsloses, . . . eine in ihrer Nacktheit schamlos wirkende Äußerung der reinen nichtswürdigen Verzweiflung” (GW 2: 403). Despite his occasional enthusiasm for the beautiful things that life has to offer, Siegfried’s mentality is not only affected by feelings of shame and guilt but also by despair, detestation, derision, cynicism, and nihilism. On the one hand, the protagonist admits: “Ich rede gern schamlos drein, aber ich schäme mich. Ich gebe mich respektlos und sehne mich danach, achten zu können”(GW 2: 401) On the other hand, he belittles humanity’s abilities and deliberately ignores human virtues. Nevertheless, as his cousin Adolf indicates, Siegfried’s haughty attitude towards humanity and his categorical denial of every human and moral value, speak for his despair and resignation (GW 2: 516).
To despair is a sin

It is puzzling that the narrator of *Tauben im Gras* defines Philipp’s despair as sin, and that the narrator of *Der Tod in Rom* identifies Siegfried’s despair as a state of mind that does not befit a human being. Thus, the question arises: why is despair condemnable or unfitting when it is an integral part of the human existence? According to the Christian faith, despair is a sin, because it demonstrates disbelief in God’s omnipotence and the possibility of one’s atonement. However, from a secular point of view, it seems that human beings should overrule despair, since they are endowed with reason, a conscience, and freedom of choice. Provided that people’s actions are not determined by force, they are capable of contemplating and recognizing their problems and options, of choosing their moral values, and of freely determining their own actions. In other words, it seems that Koeppen wishes his reader to oppose despair on the ground that it is a state of mind in which an individual, convinced of the futility of his or her actions, refuses to believe in his or her potential, possibilities, and values, and makes no use of his or her ability to overcome it.

In any case, based on the description of the unresolved lives of his somewhat dysfunctional protagonists and other peripheral characters, it can be deduced that Koeppen opposes despair if it leads to apathy, irresolution, a lack of commitment, passiveness, and resignation. Although uncovering the truth, in other words, the recognition of one’s own and humanity’s inadequate conduct and guilt, is unsettling for one’s conscience and possibly results in shame, grief, and paralyzing despondency, the author hopes that his reader will face the truth about him- or herself and others. Since
humans are equipped with reason and a conscience and have the aptitude of stirring and challenging other people’s minds with their thoughts and actions, Koeppen suggests having faith in one’s capabilities. He also brings to his reader’s attention that innocence cannot be claimed on the basis of passiveness. A lack of intervention might indirectly contribute to human suffering. Instead of going astray in endless confusion, doubts, shame, despondency, or derision, Koeppen indicates that his contemporaries should rather order their thoughts, make full use of their mental faculties, and search for means to improve their condition, even when they do not see a solution to their problems at the moment. Siegfried asserts in *Der Tod in Rom* that it unlikely that one person can change the whole world: “[M]an konnte nur sich selbst ändern, und jeder mußte das für sich selbst tun, ganz allein” (*GW* 2: 503). Nonetheless, the protagonist admits that he could at least try to make a difference (*GW* 2: 502). In any case, the reader should by now be aware that humanity’s well-being would improve if only every one would rectify his or her individual shortcomings and wrongdoings.

Infinite possibilities

To put his contemporaries’ despondency about the hardship and intricacy of life into perspective, Koeppen signals in *Tauben im Gras* that the feelings of being doomed, lost, trapped, and entangled are not unique:

Das Knäuel, das Labyrinth, der Knoten, das Verschlungen, das Geflecht,
Sinnbilder des Verirrens, des Irrens überhaupt, der Verknotung, des Unlösbaren, des Verflochtenen, schon die Alten hatten den Fluch gespürt, die Tücke erkannt,
As the passage reveals, already the ancients used the clew, the labyrinth, the knot, and the tangle as symbols for the pitfalls of human existence. In this manner, the author imparts to his reader that losing the right path, falling into traps, and struggling with the complexity of life and moral issues are timeless aspects of life that every human has to master. Koeppen’s subtle admonishment – “Die nächste Generation sollte klüger sein... Seit fünftausend Jahren!” (GW 2: 257) – might also lead to the reader’s recognition that he or she should rather seize and take control of respective problems and make every endeavor to overcome them.

Carmen Ulrich makes an interesting observation. She points out that Koeppen uses the labyrinth not only as a mythological element but also “auf der formalen wie auf der inhaltlichen Ebene” (92). She connects the author’s method with the presentation of labyrinths in the fine arts. Ulrich elucidates that the beholder of Giovanni Battista Piranesi’s “Carcieri”–a series of etchings from the eighteenth century that represent an imaginary prison world–is lured into the architectonic intricacy of the pictures and notices inmitten des Labyrinths, daß er in ein Chaos zusammenhangloser Einzel-perspektiven geraten ist, die sich im Unendlichen verlieren. Die Gesetze, an die sein räumliches Vorstellungsvermögen gebunden ist, besitzen keine Gültigkeit mehr, und sein Erkenntnisvermögen erweist sich als unzureichend (92).
I agree with Ulrich and argue that Koeppen poses with the portrayal of seemingly disconnected and enigmatic lives the question how each individual contributes to the chaos of human existence.

Ulrich refers particularly to a scene in *Das Treibhaus*, in which the building of the German Parliament is alluded to as a labyrinth and Keetenneuve as Theseus:

“Keetenneuve dachte: das Labyrinth ist leer, der Stier des Minos wandelt verehrt unter dem Volk, und ewig irrt Theseus durch die Gänge” (*GW* 2: 319). Once again, as Ulrich interprets the scene, humanity has to free itself from the curse of the Minotaur, but the labyrinth is empty and the “unendliche Anzahl möglicher Wege macht den Umherirrenden ihre Gefangenschaft um so bewußter, je beliebiger die Entscheidung für eine Richtung ist” (93). Another passage in *Das Treibhaus* echoes the theme of infinite possibilities but with a positive undertone. The protagonist ponders:


Likewise, in *Der Tod in Rom*, Friedrich Wilhelm Pfaffrath, Siegfried’s father and a former Nazi supporter, senses that there had been another path for him and his country than the “Heerstraße, die er gegangen war; eine andere Möglichkeit, an die er nie geglaubt hatte, . . . doch ihr war er untreu gewesen, und das andere Deutschland war für immer versäumt worden” (*GW* 2: 562). However, Koeppen indicates that despair

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39 The religious connotation of the quote is obvious. Yet, as the author indicates, there is an infinite number of ways for everyone, and faith is one path among the many that can be taken.
possibly prevents people from exploring new options: “War [Siegfried] verzweifelt weil er keinen Ausweg sah, oder gab es für ihn keinen Weg, weil er über jeden Pfad die Nacht der Verzweiflung breitete und ihn ungangbar gemacht hatte” (GW 2: 403)? In other words, Koeppen suggests that people have choices, and there are infinite numbers of alternative ways for each individual to actualize a better existence, even when he or she does not recognize it at the moment.

Humanity’s dual nature

To prepare the ground for a truthful evaluation of humankind’s condition, Koeppen calls to attention that deceit, envy, greed, brutality, and bloodshed are more common and widespread than idealists wish to admit:


The author combines in this passage mythology, history, and present time. His allusion to Mars (the god of war), to Mercury (the god of traders and thieves), and to Clio (the muse of history), emphasizes the violent and devious aspects of human nature throughout time. The reference to the gods evokes further the high cultures of the Greeks and Romans and their unprincipled and acquisitive conquests that shook Europe, Africa, and Asia. The historical dimension is reinforced through the allusion to the unscrupulous, ambitious, and treacherous commander Albrecht von Wallenstein and the character Judejahn, the
fictitious former general of the SS in Der Tod in Rom. Wallenstein and Judejahn evoke the Thirty Years’ War and WWII, two of the most atrocious and devastating wars in German history. The author’s allusion to Judejahn, who currently runs a military training camp in the Middle East, and to the news of the present-day press brings the age-old, global, and perpetual conflicts and defects of human aspiration to a full temporal and spatial circle. Nevertheless, the author hopes that his readers will recognize that this immoral and harmful conduct will continue in the future if they do not make an effort to bring this vicious cycle to a halt.

Despite his description of humanity’s age-old wickedness that negates idealistic concepts of humankind’s potential, Koeppen suggests that his contemporaries should not surrender to shame, disgust, cynicism, or even nihilism. As the novels’ protagonists demonstrate, a capitulation to these feelings leads to negative, passive, non-committal, and morally blameworthy behavior. The author rather hopes that his contemporaries seek the truth earnestly and perceive not only humanity’s positive but also its negative attributes. To comfort those who despair of their own and their fellow citizens’ unethical conduct during the Third Reich, Koeppen indicates that they are not mere brutes, despite all their imperfections. As the protagonist of Tauben im Gras points out: “Zwei Seelen, ja, zwei Seelen wohnten in jeder Brust, und mal schlug das Herz mit der einen und mal mit der anderen Seele” (GW 2: 163-64).

Koeppen alludes with Philipp’s statement to a passage in Goethe’s Faust, part one,

Zwei Seelen wohnen, ach! in meiner Brust,

Die eine will sich von der andern trennen;
Die eine hält, in derber Liebeslust,
Sich an die Welt, mit klammernden Organen:
Die andre hebt gewaltsam sich vom Dust
Zu den Gefilden hoher Ahnen (1112-17).

Goethe’s play is a universal parable of human life that illuminates humanity’s search for knowledge and its zest for deeds. The cited passage reveals Faust’s confession that he is torn between his earthbound desires and the nobler aspirations of his mind. By alluding to Faust’s inner strife, Koeppen brings the dichotomy and correlation of the human mind and body into focus. He reminds the reader that unscrupulous and ill-considered ambitions and desires harm people’s morality. Nevertheless, as Koeppen’s subtle frowning upon passive, indifferent, and non-committal behavior indicates, the author does not reject desires, ambitions, or actions per se. He rather seems to object to actions that are not preceded by skeptical, thoughtful, and moral reflections. The author certainly hopes that his readers will find a way to bring the contradictory claims of mind and body into a proper balance.

40 Faust laments that the study of philosophy, law, medicine, and even theology does not lead him to the sense of the human existence (354-383). Thus, he signs, unbound by any scruples and moral doubts, a pact with the devil to quench his insatiable thirst for truth and knowledge.
41 Through the metaphor of the forceful ascendancy of the mind from the dust, Goethe elucidates that it takes enormous will power and cultural refinement to overcome one’s more primitive worldly desires and physical passions.
42 Behude illuminates in Tauben in Gras unsuccessful means to restore one’s inner equilibrium. The psychiatrist donates blood on a frequent basis. However, the narrator reveals in a mocking tone that the psychiatrist is an “abstrakter Samariter” whose blood is just a chemical cipher (GW 2: 25). The moral implication of donating blood, i.e., saving other people’s lives, escapes Behude. He does it for the money and to purge himself from guilt: “Dr. Behude brauchte die zehn Mark, aber es war nicht nur der Betrag, der ihn zu diesem Handel veranlaßte. Dr. Behude kasteite sich. Es war eine mönchische Geiselung, der er sich unterzog, und die Blutentnahme war ein Versuch, wie die Hanteln, die Morgenläufe, die Rumpfbeugen, die Atemübungen, ein Gleichgewicht herzustellen zwischen den Kräften des Körpers und der Seele” (GW 2: 26). In this manner, Koeppen signals that his contemporaries’ physical and psychical powers are thrown out of equilibrium. They rather focus on their financial and physical well-being than mending their mental and moral deficiencies.
Likewise, in *Der Tod in Rom*, Kürenberg, the conductor of Siegfried’s symphony explains to his protégé that human behavior is contradictory: “In mir sind Widersprüche und Widersprüche sind in ihnen – das widerspricht sich nicht” (*GW* 2: 440). Hanbidge, who analyzed the characters in Koeppen’s novels, argued that none of Koeppen’s portrayed individuals can “be subsumed under any one label, such as ‘good’ or ‘bad’” (135). Indeed, the majority of Koeppen’s characters are neither good nor bad. However, the infamous Nazi general in *Der Tod in Rom* is an exception. It is my contention that the author portrays Gottlieb Judejahn as the incarnation of evil to leave no doubt about what kind of people would return if Germany would grant former Nazis amnesty.

Self-reflection and self-awareness: the basis of a sound moral conscience

A clear example for the inconsistent and contradictory nature of human beings is Emilia in *Tauben im Gras*. The narrator describes Philipp’s spouse as a kind-hearted and charming Dr. Jekyll but also as a feisty and drunken Mr. Hyde (*GW* 2: 167). Koeppen alludes here to *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), a novel by Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894) that examines the duality of human nature and discusses the relationship between evil and good within a human’s soul. As Stevenson claims, the

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43 Dr. Jekyll, a scientist and respected member of the society, wishes to separate, by means of a drug, the good part of his personality from its evil counterpart. On the one hand, he wishes to free himself from unwanted passions and desires that conflict with his moral conscience. On the other hand, he wants to pursue his natural desires, which he has to hide from the society to maintain his social reputation. The experiment fails. The pure and unconscious evil part of his soul springs forth in form of a highly energetic, animal-like Mr. Hyde, who commits repulsive crimes under the influence of his now unbound desires. Yet, Dr. Jekyll does not emerge as purely good person but remains a composite being, whose conscience begins to weaken. The drug initially allows Dr. Jekyll to be either his composite self or the embodiment of his evil side. However, after a while, the transformation takes place by itself. Mr. Hyde, who is now uncontrolled by a conscience and indifferent towards evil, yearns for free reign and emerges with vicious vigor. In
duality of human nature, good and evil, is essential for a human being. The natural instincts, which include a person’s evil passions, desires, and inclinations, provide the individual with vital energy or will power, while the human conscience, without the awareness of one’s inherent evil, cannot come into being or ceases to exist. By means of the intertextual reference to Stevenson’s story, Koeppen imparts to his contemporaries that their conscience and moral strength depend on the awareness of their inner evil. In other words, self-reflection and self-awareness are essential for an individual’s moral conduct.

Moreover, Koeppen implies that the dichotomy of Emilia’s behavior–she is fully aware of her dual personality–is conditioned by outer and inner forces that affect her attitude. As the narrator ironically states, Emilia and her inheritance have fallen victim to “dem Zeitgeist und seiner Planung” (GW 2: 88). Thus, she yells at her father, “du Nazi, du Tor, Verschleuderer, mußtest mitmarschieren, mitlaufen, bist Mitläufer, Hakenkreuz auf der Brust, futsch das Geld, konntet ihr nicht Ruhe geben?” (GW 2: 37). However, Emilia blames others for her conduct, does not control her emotions, and forgets to scrutinize her state of mind and to question her own behavior. Not only financial problems but also her husband’s inattentive and seemingly insensitive attitude causes her to snap: “Noch war sie Dr. Jekyll. Sie hatte noch nicht viel getrunken, sie wollte Dr. Jekyll bleiben. Dr. Jekyll wollte nett zu Philipp sein. Aber Philipp war nicht da. Er hatte sich ihr entzogen. Er hatte den lieben Dr. Jekyll nicht liebgehabt” (GW 2: 211). Emilia’s complaint about her husband’s seemingly callous attitude brings me to the trilogy’s theme of the human heart.

contrast, Dr. Jekyll’s natural instincts and his will power are rapidly waning, and he increasingly lacks the strength to fight his evil counterpart.
The human heart

Koeppen indicates at various places in his trilogy that many of his contemporaries lack at times compassion and ignore the intuition of their heart, which impairs their moral behavior. It is important to remember that the author regards the heart as an agent that is capable of extracting and defining the essence of one’s existence, which implies that not only rational thought leads to the truth but also the human heart. As the following quote demonstrates, the author senses an important interrelation between the heart and the human conscience: “Das Gewissen war so wenig zu sehen und zu begreifen wie der rechte Weg, und nur zuweilen glaubte man es pochen zu hören, was wiederum mit Kreislaufstörungen erklärt werden konnte” (emphasis added, GW 2: 293). In other words, Koeppen believes that truth and knowledge of right and wrong are not only apprehended by the intellect but also recognized by the heart. Ergo, during the search for the truth, it is important to listen to one’s heart when reason gets entangled in the intricate net of moral issues.

For example, “der schwache, mittellose, von Herzklopfen und Schwindel gequälte Philipp” lacks compassion for his wife, who sells her family’s inherited silverware, china, and jewelry to make a living (GW 2: 37). An acquaintance gets to the bottom of the problem and chides the protagonist of Tauben im Gras: “Sie dürfen sich nicht treiben lassen . . . wie sieht das aus! Ein Mann mit Ihrem Talent! Sie dürfen sich nicht von ihrer Frau ernähren lassen. Sie müssen sich aufraffen, Philipp” (GW 2: 55). He knows that his idleness contributes to his spouse’s dilemma: “Es ist meine Schuld, wenn sie unglücklich ist, warum verschaffe ich ihr kein Glück?” (GW 2: 167) Yet, he ignores his conscience
and does nothing to improve their dire financial situation. On the other hand, when Philipp feels the impulse to sexually abuse Kay, a young American woman, he feels his heart grow cold. Assisted by his heart, he reflects upon his desire and comes to the conclusion that he does not want to become evil and holds himself back (GW 2: 218).

Hanbidge maintains that Philipp’s behavior is defined by his moral consciousness (129). Nonetheless, his moral reflection is preceded by the sensation that is heart is growing cold: “[Er] fühlte sein Herz erkalten. Er dachte »ich will nicht böse werden: kein Herz aus Stein«” (GW 2: 218).

Likewise, Keetenheuve’s heart is troubled: “Er hatte ihnen”–the protagonist of Das Treibhaus refers in this passage to differently minded politicians–“entgegentreten wollen: das Herz hatte freudig geschlagen. Er war ihnen begegnet (und sich selbst): das Herz ging unruhig, verzagt, japste, ein gehetztes Weidtier” (GW 2: 324). In other words, Keetenheuve intended to be a morally upright and resolute politician who fights for human rights. However, when the protagonist loses faith in his potential and political endeavor, his heart recognizes his despair and suffers from his dwindling moral strengths. Nonetheless, Keetenheuve ignores his inner voice and evades the burden of his responsibility by jumping off the bridge.

In addition, Keetenheuve lacked compassion in his marriage. Directly after the war, he had worked incessantly, neglected his young wife, and discounted her love: “Im Dickicht [der Politik] vergaß er, daß eine Sonne ihm leuchtete, daß ihm ein Wunder widerfahren war, eine liebte ihn, Elke” (GW 2: 233). Consequently, his wife became excruciatingly lonely (GW 2: 234). Only after Elke’s death does Keetenheuve recognize with regret how much her love meant to him and that work cannot fill the void in his life.
Therefore, he concludes: “Ein Mensch genügte dem Leben einen Sinn zu geben” (GW 2: 310). Quack explains that Keetenheuve prefers in the end the personal sphere and sees “den entscheidenden Fehler seines Lebens darin, sie zugunsten der politischen Aufgabe vernachlässigt zu haben” (177). Considering that many of Koeppen’s contemporaries had lost their grip on life and searched desperately for a reliable perspective, Keetenheuve’s statement—one human is sufficient to give life a meaning—is a comforting message. Yet, if the reader takes Elke’s instability, as well as Emilia’s loneliness, into consideration, he or she might recognize that it is imprudent to make his or her well-being dependent on other people. Thus, Keetenheuve’s aforementioned statement raises also the following question: if one human is enough to give life meaning, should not every individual be the one who gives his or her own life meaning?

Siegfried, on the other hand, feels compassion but ignores the intuition of his heart. The protagonist of Der Tod in Rom recognizes the mercy of an old woman, who rescues stray cats from starvation. Nonetheless, he looks the other way when he encounters poverty, although it grieves him (GW 2: 398). For example, Siegfried would like to buy a bottle of wine for a poor man but desists from it. He is ashamed of this friendly inspiration and gets angry with himself (GW 2: 449). If the reader takes Siegfried’s nihilistic attitude into consideration, he or she might recognize that the young composer is in this instance on the verge of contradicting himself. Acting upon his charitable impulse would bring about a moral act, which would invalidate his disbelief in human beings’ moral potential. It might or might not be that his anger originates from the awareness of his own inconsistent disposition and conduct. In any case, Siegfried has difficulties doing what is right. The protagonist’s hesitating, inquisitive, and skeptical
attitude certainly originated from the awareness that he has been subject to mental conditioning during the Third Reich. His belief in common sense has been shattered, and he now questions everything. Although his spontaneous impulse to buy a poor man a bottle of wine is absolutely unconditional, Siegfried does not act upon his friendly intuition. One has to keep in mind that Koeppen does not address a political issue in this scene. A critical stance towards socio-political forces that endanger one’s mental and moral integrity and freedom is essential, but unconditional charity and genuine warm-heartedness are valid personal and moral values that Koeppen never ridicules.

Especially two of the trilogy’s peripheral characters, Emmi and Frost-Forestier, absolutely lack compassion. Emmi, Hillegonda’s nanny in Tauben im Gras, a devout believer who should be familiar with the Christian concept of love and mercy, shows no pity for the needy little girl in her care. She believes in a strict regimen and is described as an unrelenting guard (GW 2: 13). Instead of alleviating Hillegonda’s needs, the zealot contributes with her heartlessness to the girl’s fear and forlornness. Emmi thinks that she loves the child. Yet, she is convinced that she is not allowed to show Hillegonda any affection and believes that only rigor can wrench her away from hell (GW 2: 115).

Further, Frost-Forestier in Das Treibhaus, as his name already indicates, is a cold-hearted man. The narrator describes him as an unfeeling automaton: “Frost-Forestier war das Werk, das in Gang gesetzt wurde. Er eiferte den elektronischen Gehirnen nach” (GW 2: 242). Schauer fittingly interprets him as a “Technokrat, der auf Funktionieren programmiert ist, träumt nicht, hat keine Angst und keine Furcht” (134). Neither feelings nor a guilty conscience increases his heart beat, but rather caffeine (GW 2: 297). In other
words, the author indicates that the faculty of reason is insufficient by itself and needs to be supplemented by a sensitive heart and perceptive conscience.

Washington Price in *Tauben im Gras*, demonstrates that a loving heart is capable of controlling a person’s primitive and evil impulses. The African-American soldier is in anguish. Carla Behrend, his girlfriend, is with child but wishes to end the pregnancy. In contrast, Washington wants to set a good example: “Er wollte das Band, das nun zu reißen drohte, das Band zwischen Weiß und Schwarz, nicht lösen, er wollte es fester knüpfen durch ein Kind, er wollte ein Beispiel geben . . . ” (*GW* 2: 160). When Carla rages and calls him names, he feels the urge to hit her but desists from it. As the narrator remarks, “Es ist immer die Verzweiflung, die prügeln will . . .” (*GW* 2: 160). Yet, Washington’s faith in the power of love overcomes his despair. He embraces his girlfriend, consoles her, and promises that things will work out, provided that they love each other (*GW* 2: 160-61).

This does not mean that the author regards love as panacea. Nonetheless, Koeppen implies that reason that is not supplemented by a sensitive heart that feels what is morally right and, thus, keeps a person’s irrational and evil impulses in check might lead to immoral behavior. Moreover, through numerous references to people’s agitated, suffering, cold, or empty hearts, Koeppen imparts to his contemporaries that a human’s moral disposition and conduct and the well-being of his or her heart are interrelated.

For example, as the narrator in *Das Treibhaus* points out, Knurrewahn, the head of the opposition party, “hatte viel durchgemacht; aber er war nicht weise geworden” (*GW* 2: 286). Initially, he had pursued knowledge and fought for justice, two honorable endeavors. Yet, when he realized that knowledge and justice are concepts that are
difficult to determine and “immer relativ zur unbekannten Größe,” he turned to the pursuit of “Herrschaft und Macht,” two dubious values that impair his moral integrity (GW 2: 285-86). As the narrator states, Knurrewahn’s “Herz war gut gewesen; nun hatte es sich verhärtet” (GW 2: 286). From this follows that Koeppen hopes that his postwar readers, for the sake of their humaneness, will recognize that they should nurture and mend not only their cognitive but also their sensitive faculties.

Yet, Koeppen indicates that people who act primarily on an intuitive level, such as the all too trusting, wide-eyed Laura in Der Tod in Rom, are subject to ill-considered speculation and illusionary imagination. The Italian has an affair with the former Nazi general Judejahn and seems to be, at a first glance, an open-hearted and friendly young woman who likes to make other people happy. Yet, if one looks a little closer, her friendliness appears to be conditional. In return for sexual favors, she expects presents from her suitors:

Ein Mädchen brauchte Schmuck, ein Mädchen brauchte Kleider, auch ein Mädchen, das nicht rechnen kann, braucht dünne Strümpfe, und sie war gewohnt, daß sie gelegentlich etwas bekam; gelegentlich machte sie kleine Fischzüge, in aller Unschuld . . . (GW 2: 572).

Moreover, the narrator describes her in a mocking tone that leaves no doubt about her mental ignorance: “Nichts warnte sie, einen Mörder zu sehen. Sie dachte, falls sie überhaupt dachte, denn Denken war ihr fremd, und sie pflegte dafür ein vegetatives Sinnen: Familienvater, in Geschäften hier . . .” (GW 2: 424). Laura is impressed by Judejahn’s car. She senses in the car a promising sex symbol and concludes that he is a man, “dem man sich weiblich unterwirft . . . aus Sklavinneninstinkt, weil er ein
Mächtiger ist . . .” (GW 2: 520). She assumes that her smile, “das bezaubernde strahlende und von keinem Gedanken getrübte Wunder ihres Lächelns,” charms the old Nazi (GW 2: 473). However, all that Judejahn sees is in her is a whore, someone he can hate, rape, and kill (GW 2: 475). Since Laura neglected her mind for such a long time, she fails to question his integrity, his motives, and her own mind, which is dominated by submissiveness. Moreover, blinded by her own physical and material desires, she mistakes his bestial sexual rage for passion: “Sie streichelte ihn noch eine Weile. Sie fühlte sein Herz schlagen; es war ein tapferes Herz, weil es sich für ihre Mädchenlust so ausgegeben hatte” (GW 2: 575). When Judejahn shoots toward the end of the novel the Holocaust survivor Ilse Kürenberg to carry through his Nazi ideology, Laura is utterly confused. She senses that something terrible has happened, but she relates the tragedy of the event not only to the Jewish woman’s death but also to not receiving a present:

Laura weinte ins Bett hinein, . . . sie begriff nicht was vorgefallen war, aber Entsetzliches war geschehen, der Mann hatte geschossen, er hatte zum Fenster hinausgeschossen – und er hatte ihr kein Geschenk gegeben (GW 2: 576).

Laura, whose perception is clearly impaired by her physical and materialistic desires, her imagination, and her lack of reflection, simply does not comprehend that Judejahn is just a cold-blooded slayer, who wants to satisfy his sex drive and his urge to kill.

Laura’s tendency to fall for illusions brings me to Koeppen’s discussion of internal and external forces, such as desires, self-love, self-hatred, imagination, self-interest, powerful organizations, social groups, and cultural traditions that potentially endanger a person’s mental and moral integrity, as well as his or her freedom. The author’s wish to draw attention to these forces most likely originated from his
contemporaries’ blind docility and conformism that brought the Nazis to power, the mental conditioning of the collective during the Third Reich, and the subsequent manipulation of the masses by the Nazis. Further, the focus of postwar society on immediate satisfaction of needs and wants after years of deprivation deflected people’s minds from the contemplation of socio-political, moral, and ethical issues. This negligence certainly induced the author’s to convey to his contemporaries that numerous inner and outer forces possibly impair their disposition and freedom. However, before I discuss the aforementioned forces, a clarification of the concept of freedom is necessary.

Constituents of Freedom

Due to Germany’s defeat and the subsequent democratization process by the Western coalition, West Germans were in a political sense free. That is to say, they were freed by the allies from an oppressive government and regained under the guidance of the United States civil and political liberties. Unfortunately, many postwar Germans failed to grasp the profounder meaning of freedom. The protagonist of Tauben im Gras indicates this lacuna when he states, “ich habe mein Leben lang die Freiheit gesucht, aber ich habe mich verlaufen (GW 2: 206). Familiar with the Western philosophical tradition, Koeppen knew that true freedom transcends freedom from civil and political constraints. He was aware that freedom involves many constituents, such as feeling, reasoning, consciousness, will, choice, morality, and responsibility.44 That is to say, he

44 Already Aristotle (384-322 BC) argued that the “origin of action is choice” and that the “origin of choice is desire and reasoning with a view to an end. This is why choice cannot exist either without reason and intellect or without a moral state” (qtd. from Beabout 135). Consequently, Aristotle defined choice as “deliberate desire” and moral virtue as “a state of character concerned with choice” (qtd. from Roberts,
comprehended that one needs to be morally concerned; consciously direct one’s feelings, passions, and desires; and deliberately act upon what one thinks is right and good to gain genuine freedom. In this context, I interpret the morally indifferent, pleasure-driven, indecisive, passive, and non-committal behavior of the trilogy’s characters as a sign of their non-free state. Since his contemporaries’ freedom depended on their awareness of freedom and free choice, their moral conscience, and commitment, Koeppen brings the subject matter to his readers’ attention.

As the narrator of Tauben im Gras points out, Emilia searches for freedom:

Für einen Augenblick wenigstens wollte sie frei sein. Sie wollte frei handeln, eine freie Tat tun, die von keinem Zwang und keiner Notwendigkeit bestimmt und mit keiner Absicht verbunden war, außer der Absicht frei zu sein; doch auch dies war keine Absicht, es war ein Gefühl, und das Gefühl war eben da, ganz absichtslos” (GW 2: 154-55).

The passage reveals Emilia’s idea of freedom and free choice and indicates that in order to be free a person’s actions have to be unconditional. Since people’s actions ought to be determined by neither necessity nor force, a critical stance towards oneself and the external world is crucial to one’s freedom. Unable to sell her pearls and diamonds to the owner of a jewelry store, Emilia turns to Kay, a young American woman who is looking in the store at some coral and garnet necklaces, and says: “»Lassen Sie die Korallen und Granaten. Sie sind rot und hübsch. Aber diese Perlen und Diamanten sind hübscher . . . Ich schenke sie Ihnen. Ich schenke sie dir, weil du nett bist«” (GW 2: 155). In this instant,

182). Likewise Plutarch (46-120 AD) held that “Ethical virtue has the passions for its material” and “reason for its form” (qtd. from Roberts 182). That is to say, choice has a moral connotation. St. Augustine (354-430) sheds more light on the subject matter. He argues that free choice is initially nothing more than the formal and indifferent means or precondition of freedom, while he defines true freedom as “a dynamic commitment to a virtuous end” (qtd. from Jackson 247).
Emilia experiences, as the narrator points out, the incredible happiness of a free act that is determined by neither necessity nor force, only by the desire to act freely. Moreover, both women respect and treat each other as ends in themselves. While the one gives freely, the other freely accepts the gift.

Emilia concurs in this passage with Kant, who demanded that our behavior should always be unconditional. In particular, Kant insisted that one should respect other people as end in themselves, in contrast to treating others as means to an end, and act in a way that preserves their dignity and freedom: “Act in such a way that you always treat humanity whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as means, but always at the same time as an end” (96).

Unfortunately, as the narrator remarks, Emilia’s happiness will not last, but “für den Augenblick war sie frei” (GW 2: 155). As the quote implies, true freedom is only achieved by the perpetual exercise of freedom. In this particular scene, Emilia recognizes her freedom, reflects upon her intuition, concludes that her desire is morally acceptable, and resolutely acts upon it. However, in other scenes she is described as a woman who abdicates her freedom and allows her emotions and desires to determine her actions. She rages about the loss of her family’s wealth that provided her with the illusion of security and blames her husband for destroying her peace of mind by leading her “in das Reich der Intellektualität, der Armut, des Zweifels und der Gewissensnot” (GW 2: 211). She does not realize that she should rather reason well, sharpen her perceptions and conscience, control her emotions, and take life into her own hands. Thus, the narrator’s aforementioned assessment of Emilia’s condition is justified.
In addition, Emilia and Kay feel in this scene “das wunderbare Glück, gegen Vernunft und Sitte zu rebellieren” (GW 2: 155). By stressing the simultaneous feelings of freedom and rebellion against rationality and custom, Koeppen imparts to his reader that a critical evaluation of conventional values and customs is essential to personal freedom. In other words, if an individual follows blindly commonly accepted norms, values, and customs without consciously choosing them and freely acting upon them, the person waives his or her freedom. Since numerous inner and outer forces pose a potential threat to one’s freedom, the author brings these forces into focus.

The pitfalls of desires

All of Koeppen’s characters search for some satisfaction in their lives. Although the pursuit of pleasure, knowledge, reputation, and power are common means to reach some happiness, the author reminds the reader that these desires possibly impair an individual’s mental and moral integrity and are capable of undermining a person’s freedom. For example, Carla Behrend in Tauben im Grass desires wealth and dreams of “faule Glückseligkeit” (GW 2: 172). When she gets pregnant, her dream crumbles. As Schauer puts it, “Carla hat Angst, daß sie nach Jahren der Not das erträumte Paradies nicht erreichen kann; sie ist zu keinem Opfer bereit und entscheidet sich deshalb gegen das Kind” (78). Carla knows that her African-American boyfriend cannot fulfill her dream of a life full of luxury: “Nur der Zug der weißen Amerikaner führte in die Traumwelt der Magazinbilder, in die Welt des Wohlstandes, der Sicherheit und des Behagens” (GW 2: 123). Blinded by materialism, she discounts initially Washington’s
love, as well as his request to have the baby. Since Carla expects material gain from her relationship to Washington, her conduct is unmistakably conditional. Her actions are not free but determined by her desires. Even worse, Carla treats her partner as means to an end and, thus, violates his dignity. Likewise, she ignores moral issues and just wishes to end the pregnancy. When Washington prevents the abortion by informing her gynecologist that he wants the baby, Carla’s morally concerned heart calms down (GW 2: 171). As the narrator states, Carla is now liberated from the dream of “faule Glückseligkeit des Daseins,” from the burden of her desire that determined her conduct and the immoral intentions that agitated her heart (GW 2: 171-72).

Further, the well-educated Kürenbergs in Der Tod in Rom get their satisfaction in life from art appreciation and physical pleasures. Erlach defines their life style as “wahrhaft harmonische Lebensweise, die deutlich am Ideal einer hellen hedonistischen und ästhetischen Antike orientiert ist” (166). They love each other and, especially Ilse, take life as it comes (GW 2: 436). The Kürenbergs are friendly people and their conduct seems to be flawless. Still, the narrator describes them as “wohlgepflegte Tiere” (GW 2: 404). The problem seems to be their total devotion to immediate happiness and their attitude to take life as it comes (GW 2: 436). The Kürenbergs worship beauty, savor bodily pleasures, and suppress the ugly aspects of human life. Similarly, Erlach states: “Alles Häßliche, Böse und Gemeine haben sie aus ihrem Leben verbannt und verdrängt” (166). From the conductor’s performance and his wife’s assessment of Siegfried’s symphony can be inferred that the couple tends towards the palliation of life’s negative aspects. Kürenberg’s “gebändigte Empfindung” of Siegfried’s musical approach to the

45 Unlike Laura, Ilse Kürenberg is not subject to her imagination. As the following quote reveals, Ilse knows the difference between the so-called bastion of art and the real world: “[W]ie einfältig war es von

Nonetheless, the Kürenbergs have a valid reason for their flight into the world of classical beauty and harmony. Ilse Kürenberg is Jewish. Her family got killed by the Nazis, and she desperately wishes to forget the atrocities of the Holocaust. She barely escaped the Nazi persecution by going into exile. As a result of the tremendous agony that she had to endure, she refuses to cope any longer with distress: “Sie hatte . . . in ihrem Leben erfahren, daß es besser sei, Leid und Wehmut zu fliehen. Sie wollte nicht leiden. Nicht mehr. Sie hatte genug gelitten” (GW 2: 403). Siegfried’s description of the couple as “zwitschernde Schwalben” and “Exkursanten, die sich’s in einer vielleicht unwirtlichen Welt wirtlich gemacht hatten und sich des Erdballs freuten” certainly contains an ironic undertone (GW 2: 431-32). Ilse’s traumatic encounter with Friedrich Wilhelm Pfaffrath and Gottlieb Judejahn—two high-ranking former Nazis—after the premiere of Siegfried’s symphony sheds light on her flight from reality:

[E]s war ihr, als bräche eine Mauer auf, hinter der man Gespenster eingemauert hatte. Sie hatte sie nie wieder sehen wollen; sie wollte sich an die Gespenster nicht erinnern, und nun waren die Gespenster da, waren durch die Mauer

ihrem Vater, zwischen ihrem Märchenleben und dem Kaufhof eine Mauer aus Büchern, Musik und Kunst zu errichten, eine Bastion, die trog, einen milden Lampenschein, der für immer erlosch” (GW 2: 483). Consequently, Ilse’s flight into the world of classical art is a conscious choice.

46 Siegfried’s symphony is a twelve-tone composition, devised by Arnold Schönberg that avoids tonal harmony. Kürenberg’s attempt to bring even the slightest harmony into the symphony defies the purpose of the music. Moreover, Koeppen’s literary composition, his emphasis on the questionable interrelation between people that causes the disharmonious bitter-sweetness of life, seems to correspond with Siegfried’s musical expression.
The Kürenbergs’ flight into the world of beauty and physical pleasure is from a psychological point of view absolutely understandable. Still, the question remains: Does a non-committal, hedonistic disposition and lifestyle prevent reckless agencies from violating other people’s rights? In any case, by raising this question, Koeppen calls to mind that there are no easy answers to moral questions.

Like the pursuit of pleasure, the zeal for knowledge can serve debatable motives. Generally speaking, knowledge is essential to understand oneself, others, the world, and how we, as individuals, contribute to human existence. Nonetheless, the author indicates that intellectual endeavors can be a matter of pride and might be used as means to a dubious end. Edwin, the American author in Tauben im Gras, is an example for the vanity of the so-called wise (GW 2: 170). The “hohe poetische Ton, die christlich-abendländische Wertgewißheit und die Position der geistigen Führerschaft” characterize him (Schauer 94). Moreover, he symbolizes the mental tutelage of the American occupational forces and their attempt to reeducate the German people in the bourgeois-conservative tradition. However, Edwin comes “mit leeren Händen, ohne Gabe, ohne Trost,” and empty-hearted (GW 2: 45). In addition, his motives—he strives for a prestigious social status, the applause of the masses, and young disciples—are more than questionable (GW 2: 170).

The topic of Edwin’s re-educational lecture is the power and victory of the mind over corporal matter (GW, 2: 46). The narrator rates his message as an accumulation of dead and meaningless words, as “Grabzeichen des Geistes” (GW 2: 213). Edwin’s belief
in human ratio, in the “Zucht des Geistes,” and his public reverence of the classical tradition, which rather stresses the ideal than the actual, is certainly inappropriate for an audience that recently experienced the reign of national irratio and the victory of brute corporal force over the mind (GW 2: 105). In other words, the cultural knowledge that Edwin propagates is obsolete and palliates the negative and bitter aspects of life, which makes his message deceptive. Besides his tendency “das Licht der Wahrheit zu verklären,” his desire to use knowledge as means to mental leadership is immoral and, thus, unacceptable (GW 2: 145). He knows about Germany’s former “Sturz in die Ungeschichte” and is concerned about its present “Scheinblüte” and inability to mourn (GW 2: 106). Edwin contemplates telling the truth, but refrains from it, because he “hätte nur von Befürchtungen reden können,” which demonstrates that he does not adhere to the ideals that he propagates (GW 2: 107). He ignores his moral concerns, which should be the driving force behind his actions, allows his desire for public recognition to dominate his actions, and violates thereby his freedom.

In contrast, Koeppen deliberately breaks with traditional classicism and aestheticism that dominated German literature after WWII. Rather than presenting the world straightforward from an omniscient point of view, he writes his trilogy in a powerful modernist style and uses the high modernists’ montage technique and interior monologues to emphasize the confusing complexity of life. Further, he questions in his postwar novels not only conventional aestheticism and idealizing classicism but also the authoritative voice of the traditional artist who tells his or her readers what to think. In

47 Koeppen’s radical realism, innovative aesthetics, unpleasant candor, and frequent use of irony contradicted without a doubt the traditional taste. Many people missed in his novels, as the author expresses in Der Tod in Rom, “den Edelklang, den hohen erhabenen Ton oder die eingängige Harmonie” (GW 2: 536).
contrast, Koeppen presents issues from a multitude of contradictory perspectives to question what is commonly held as objective knowledge and truth. Since he rejects the traditional role of the artist as a prophet of truth and as a mental leader, Koeppen employs a communication method that shifts the authority from the writer to the reader. By encouraging his readers to take a critical stance and to judge for themselves, Koeppen not only respects their mental autonomy but also treats them as ends in themselves. Thus, it is not surprising that Edwin, the representative of traditional classicism whose message is prescriptive, gets mugged towards the end of the novel.

Further, Koeppen illustrates in Der Tod in Rom that success, reputation, and power are often achieved at the expense of morality and freedom. Dietrich Pfaffrath, Siegfried’s brother, is described as an ambitious social climber. As the narrator puts it, Dietrich is “schon im Vorsatz ein Staatsbeamter, der nicht dem Staat dienen, sondern ihn beherrschen wollte” (GW 2: 548). He longs to serve the mighty in the house of power, to participate in their power politics, and to become eventually mighty himself (GW 2: 476). At the moment, he is very careful not to harm his professional reputation. Yet, he is not only an opportunist who would discount moral scruples at any given time, as long as it provides him with a promising position and furthers his power, but also a person who does not hesitate to treat others as means to his end (GW 2: 492-93). Moreover, Dietrich’s desire for success, reputation and power dominate his actions, which harms his freedom.

Likewise, Siegfried’s uncle, the former SS-general Gottlieb Judejahn, demonstrates that the desire for might can lead to heartless, immoral, and inhuman demeanor. The character is portrayed as the incarnation of evil, of power in its most atrocious and abusive form, “die Verkörperung alles zu Fürchtenden und zu Hassenden”
To emphasize his primitive and bestial nature, the author frequently uses animal metaphors to describe Judejahn. Human rights and human life mean nothing to Judejahn. He believes in absolute violence and shamelessly treats people as means to an unspeakable end. His reckless brutality, which is fueled by primitive impulses that determine his actions, and his ultimate “Verzicht auf das Denken” demonstrate that the lust for power is capable of dehumanizing a person and of transforming a human into an animal-like being. By stressing Judejahn’s lack of thought, morals, and mercy, Koeppen paves the way for his reader’s recognition that a self-critical mind, a sense of self and of individual moral responsibility, a sensitive heart, and respect for other people’s rights are most essential for one’s integrity.

The deceptive power of self-love and self-hatred, the will, and imagination

As Koeppen indicates further, not only various desires but also self-love and self-hatred, imagination, and self-interests impair people’s opinions and behavior patterns. These internal forces are rather delusive and create illusions. Siegfried, who often doubts his own motives and moral integrity, recognizes that people often embellish themselves to look better in the eyes of others: “Das bin nun ich, dieser aufgeblasene Geck, dieser Lügner, Gleisner und eitle Fant” (GW 2: 393). Behind his own negative assessment

Likewise, Quack stresses Judejahn’s “animalische Sinnlichkeit” and his “tierische Entwicklungsstufe” (206).

As the narrator points out, the former Nazi general, who currently runs a military training camp in the Middle East, “hatte diesen Männern die Sanftmut genommen . . . Er hatte ihnen den Stolz genommen, das natürliche Selbstgefühl . . . Er hatte sie gebrochen, indem er sie eines lehrte: Gehorchen. Er hatte sie gut geschliffen . . . Nun standen sie aufrecht und ausgerichtet vor ihm, und ihre Seele war tot. Sie waren Soldaten. Sie waren Menschenmaterial” (GW 2: 410-11).
seems to stand his wish to be realistic and truthful, as well as his fear of falling into the trap of self-love, vanity, and self-deception. Since he is very self-conscious, he discerns that he projects at times his thoughts onto other people and states: “Es gab nur Täuschungen, Irrlichter des Augenblicks” (GW 2: 565).

With the Tiber scene in Der Tod in Rom, Koeppen brings the power of the will and imagination into focus. Initially, Siegfried realistically describes the bathing ship that anchors along the Tiber river as “schöne und schmutzige Arche Noah” (GW 2: 504). The scenery is picturesque, but the river bank is soiled with excrements and trash. Since Siegfried is disgusted by his homosexual desires, he concentrates under the influence of self-hatred on the negative aspects and describes the water of the river as foul and stinky, which might be true (GW 2: 508). Yet, after the fulfillment of his physical desire, his disposition changes radically. Now, he euphorically describes the water of the Tiber as friends with the gods and as a refreshing mythical element (GW 2: 510). Nonetheless, the self-conscious protagonist realizes that he allows his imagination to beautify reality (GW 2: 512). In this manner, Koeppen indicates that the human mind is subject to the will. In other words, when we, that is to say human beings, prefer an aspect to be true or false, good or bad, attractive or repulsive, we focus on aspects that suit our self-image and imagination and ignore the qualities that we do not wish to see. From this follows that our personal interests, ideas, and ideals, if we do not honestly assess and control them, are capable of blinding our senses, impairing our judgment, and diminishing our freedom.
A critical look at the social and political sphere

Koeppen implies that his contemporaries’ social lives are, more or less, spectacles that are based on illusions and mutual deception. As Siegfried puts it in Der Tod in Rom: “In was für Verkleidungen wir doch auftreten, traurige Clowns in einer mäßigen Verwechslungsposse” (GW 2: 551). For example, the movie star Alexander, the representative of trivial art in Tauben im Gras, often plays an archduke in various movie romances. As Schauer points out, “Alexanders Film dient der Illusionsbildung” and his conformism “entspricht auch seine Karriere während der NS-Zeit, in der er berühmt wurde” (50). As the narrator argues, the actor shamelessly uses his publicity to attract women. They fall for his fame and confuse his image with his real self: “Man verwechselte Alexander mit seinem Schatten” (GW 2: 148). In other words, Alexander’s social reputation or social persona is mistaken for his true self. In real life, he is neither a hero nor a great lover. However, he is not only a perpetrator but also a disillusioned victim of the public and the film industry. Alexander is fed up with his role, is tired of his borrowed heroism, and feels misused: “Es machte ihn schwindelig. Wer war er? Ein draufgängerisch-treu-sentimental-kühner-Helden-Potentere? Er hatte es satt. Er war müde. Er war ausgeheldet. Er war wie ein ausgenommener Kapaun: fett und hohl” (GW 2: 148). Even worse, as the quote implies, the maintenance of his Schattenexistenz undercuts his true self and confuses him. Besides, Alexander’s conduct suggests that people’s behavior is not only influenced by outside forces but also affects others. For example, the taste of the public for glorifying movies is a direct result of the Third Reich’s cultural policies. Nevertheless, accustomed to idealizing movies, the public demands their production. By
accepting the roles, Alexander affirms the insipid taste of the general public and contributes to the perpetual production of questionable movies. Even though he complies only reluctantly with the role of the great hero, he still uses his image and fame to attract women.

The crowd that comes to the world premiere of Siegfried’s symphony in Der Tod in Rom demonstrates further that social groups display at times virtues that they do not possess. In this particular scene, Siegfried employs fairy-tale metaphors to emphasize the illusionary aspects of this social group.⁵⁰ Among the arriving people are Snow White’s mother, Cinderella’s sisters, and impostors of all sorts (GW 2: 528-29). The crowd masks its real intentions and pretends sophistication, benevolence, sensitivity, and art appreciation. Yet, as Siegfried assures the reader, the people are there to be seen, to impress, to make connections, to get into business, and to further their reputation (GW 2: 528-29). The composer’s assessment might be or might be not true. Nonetheless, the reader might now be motivated to search for the truth about his or her own public display and that of others.

To call the power maneuvers of the political sphere into question, Koeppen describes the parliament in Das Treibhaus as a stage and the chancellor as an actor and film director, who holds all the strings in his hands and assigns his team players their parts in the spectacle (GW 2: 367).⁵¹ Numerous references are made to spot lights, TV cameras, and often repeated speeches and plays (GW 2: 367). At the end of the scene, when everyone leaves the hall, Keetenheuve comments on the illusionary character of the

⁵⁰ A similar crowd comes together in Tauben im Gras to celebrate Edwin. His lecture is described as social event, and Miss Burnett, a peripheral character, rightly calls this social spectacle a circus (GW 2: 183).
⁵¹ In another passage, he calls politicians “Statisten der politischen Bühne” and refers to their truths as “Dirne in vielen Gassen” (GW 2: 264).
political debate: “Es war aus. Es war alles zu Ende. Es war nur Theater gewesen; man konnte sich abschminken” (GW 2: 375). Thus, the author implies that even the moral integrity of highly respected institutions, such as the government, should be questioned, since they are subject to self-interest as anyone else. Moreover, he suggests that the professional and skilled appearance of a public institution might be used to stimulate people’s imagination in favor of its agenda and to deflect people’s mind from questioning the integrity of the establishment.52

The necessity to question authority and the collective

Koeppen recognized that power, truth, and knowledge are interrelated, and that authority can be abused to pervert truth and knowledge. During the Nazi reign, Koeppen and his contemporaries experienced firsthand that the so-called truth and knowledge can be created in the interest of people in power. For example, Hitler demanded that the press, broadcast, theatre, film, literature, and fine arts serve the State. In other words, he abused public media and agencies as means to an end. Their function was to glorify Nazi ideology, to teach obedience to the State, and to instill in the German people the willingness to sacrifice themselves for the good of the country. In fact, each German individual was ordered to subordinate his or her professional, intellectual, and moral integrity to the demands of the State and its cultural, social, and political ideology.

52 The aesthetization of the military body during the Third Reich serves as excellent example for the power of illusionary appearances. By means of party rallies and military parades, the Nazis artfully staged the masses and gave an intoxicating impression of military strengths, obedience, and unity that impaired people’s judgment.
Consequently, Koeppen guides his readers to question the motives of authorities and their methods, as well as the mind-set and conduct of the collective. Judejahn’s inner monologue in *Der Tod in Rom* reminds the reader that powerful systems are capable of abusing and exploiting the mass: “Das Volk brauchte man nicht zu fürchten. Das Volk konnte man lenken. Mit dem Volk brauchte man nicht zu reden. Das Volk wurde eingesetzt” (GW 2: 426). Further, Keetenheuve conveys in *Das Treibhaus* how dangerous the collective can be when it trends toward submissiveness, conformity, and xenophobia. His inner monologue raises the question if the people are millions of reflective individuals or a crowd of beings that do not think for themselves (GW 2: 249). According to Keetenheuve, they rather seem to be “eine Herde, zu scheren, zu scheuchen, zu leiten” and appear to consist of groups “die je nach Bedarf und nach der Sprechweise der Planer einzusetzen waren” (GW 2: 249). The protagonist defies in particular people’s fatalism and docility, their “Gefühl, es kommt doch alles wie es kommen soll, wir können da doch nichts machen” (GW 2: 360). Moreover, Keetenheuve suggests that the majority exploits at times the power of the multitude: “Die Mehrheit … ist doch ein kleiner Tyrann, und während sie herrscht, ist die Minderheit ein für alle mal geschlagen” (GW 2: 361). In other words, individuals whose ideas deviate from the main stream might have a difficult time to enforce their personal conviction, even when morality is on their side. Hence, the politician, who believes in absolute pacifism as the means to change the world, laments that nobody wants to climb with him the tightrope of such ethics, feels powerless and is disheartened (GW 2: 370).

In addition, Keetenheuve observes during a soccer game “die von den tückischen Fernrohrobjectiven aus ihrer Geborgenheit in der Masse und Anonymität grausam
herausgerissen und aller Fassung entblößten Gesichter” and is frightened (GW 2: 329). All he sees are “verkrampfte Kinnladen, haßverzerrte Münnder” and people with “Mordgier im Blick” (GW 2: 329). He recognizes in the multitude of apparently mindless individuals a danger. They seemingly wait for a leader who will transform them once again into a people, a new golem of “ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer,” a dangerous conglomerate of absolute xenophobia and violence (GW 2: 330). Keethenheuve’s comparison of the people with a golem, an artificially created unintelligent and soulless human-like being that automatically follows commands, intensifies his warning. With this scene, the author reminds his contemporaries that they should neither allow the State to treat them as means to an end nor to mold them anew into a soulless mass that automatically follows orders without thinking. They should rather be tolerant and friendly towards others and think and act as free and self-determined individuals.

Although individuals might feel stronger and more secure within a collective, Koeppen imparts to his reader that group affiliation and the execution of orders do not absolve him or her from being morally responsible for his or her personal conduct. For example, Josef, a former soldier of the Wehrmacht, ironically referred to by the narrator as “der Dienstmann,” asks himself: “War die Pflichterfüllung Sünde gewesen? Die Pflicht Sünde? Die Pflicht, von der alle redeten, schrieben, schrien und sie verherrlichten?” (GW 2: 132). As the quote implies, so-called duties might be glorified to deflect people’s minds from questioning their purpose. Considering the author’s negative stance towards docility and conformism and his account of forces that undermine

53 Likewise, Ilse, who suffered from the Third Reich’s extreme xenophobia, fears the contagious “Simplizität des in Gruppendenkens” and asks herself if she is affected by “Gruppenfeindschaft” (GW 2: 567).
people’s freedom, Koeppen certainly rates the blind performance of one’s so-called duties a grave mistake.\(^{54}\)

The author rejects not only the reduction of a human being to his or her function within the society but also the primacy of the collective over the individual. He rather calls for the right to live one’s own life, to give one’s own existence meaning, and to act freely upon carefully selected morals instead of blindly following prescribed principles.

As the author exemplifies at various points in the trilogy, principles, norms, and conventions are not objective but rather questionable temporary rules and values that are codified by the collective, in particular, by powerful leaders and their support groups. Since the principles and conduct of characters like Judejahn and kindred spirits are reprehensible, the necessity and obligation to act according to self-imposed and carefully chosen moral principles becomes obvious to the reader.

Freedom is more than a philosophical concept

Unfortunately, as Koeppen indicates in *Tauben im Grass*, many of his contemporaries content themselves with relative freedom, that is to say, freedom from constraints and the dream of possibilities. The protagonist muses as follows:

> Es war die Zeit der niederfallenden Dämmerung, . . . die Stunde der Heimkehr der Werktätigen, . . . die *heure bleue*, die Stunde des Träumens, eine Spanne relativer Freiheit . . . Die Menschen waren freigelassen von ihren Werkstätten und

\(^{54}\) Koeppen’s skepticism towards the collective, his preference of the individual, and his notion of personal freedom stand in sharp contrast to Hegel’s primacy of the community over the individual and his concept of universal freedom. Hegel argued that individuals have neither a purpose nor an identity apart from Society and State. In Hegel’s view, people are nothing more than their specific function within the socio-political collective and history (Beiser 276-77).
As the quote reveals, humans are social beings and influenced by inside and outside forces, such as the necessity to make a living, old habits, and family demands. The phrases “freigelassen von” and eingefangen von” demonstrate how much power Philipp attributes to the aforementioned forces. Nonetheless, Koeppen hopes that his readers will reflect upon their possibilities and, if they have the courage to do so, break with old habits, social conventions, and family pressures that earlier threatened to curtail their freedom.

In a similar vein, the author implies in Das Treibhaus that his contemporaries neglect their freedom. By means of Keetenheuve, who laments that the time “des zärtlichen Glaubens an Freiheit, Gleichheit, Brüderlichkeit” is gone, Koeppen raises the question whether or not it is true that these values have lost their validity (GW 2: 316). In addition, he queries if freedom, as well as human rights, might have become a phantom and a concept that “man den Philosophen zur unfruchtbaren Erörterung überließ” (GW 2: 233). Thus, it becomes clear to a perceptive reader that not only life but also freedom should be lived and not theorized. In other words, without acting upon one’s right of self-determination, freedom remains a possibility and becomes a contrived concept that lacks true substance. A clear example for the neglect of humanity’s most precious right is the protagonist himself. His life is merely “ein Entwurf zu einem wirklichen Leben” (GW 2: 353). “Keetenheuve der große Selbstbefreier,” who goes astray in the contemplation of
infinite possibilities without acting upon any of them, is not brought into existence (GW 2: 339).

Moreover, the narrator of Das Treibhaus maintains that his contemporaries are afraid of their freedom (GW 2: 233). This fear is not totally unfounded, since freedom of choice and the individual’s moral responsibility for his or her self-determined actions are interrelated. People might feel safer in the realm of purely hypothetical possibilities and imagine being free from moral responsibility by adhering to commonly accepted norms and habits. Yet, as already propounded, the author holds every individual accountable for his or her conduct. Since there is nothing to gain by waiving one’s freedom, people’s preference of external determination over self-determination is unfortunate.

The author concedes that genuine freedom is difficult to achieve. For example, Siegfried Pfaffrath in Der Tod in Rom believes that he liberated himself from his family and the ballast of the Third Reich: “Ich fühlte mich frei. Ich glaubte mich befreit und ich wollte frei bleiben . . . (GW 2: 458).” Yet, unwanted memories, his family’s immoral disposition, and their reprehensible past and present conduct disturb Siegfried’s imaginary freedom. It seems that he confuses freedom with having a clean conscience. In particular, his cousin Adolf Judejahn troubles his conscience. He summons the past and painfully reminds Siegfried of a century of national stupidity, marshal drill, and raving mad narrow-mindedness (GW 2: 502). Adolf calls to Siegfried’s mind the memory of their family’s responsibility for the course of the Third Reich, which is a fact that Siegfried desperately wishes to forget (GW 2: 502). He knows that this raving nationalism can return, but all he wants is living his own life and enjoying his liberties (GW 2: 517). Although his political ideal is “ein Bild eines wahrhaft freien, toleranten,
humanen, friedlichen Landes,” Siegfried does not believe in the actualization of this dream (Quack 216). His egoism and cynicism gain the upper hand. He ignores his moral ideals and concerns and despairs. Rather than confronting his family members and trying to awaken and sharpen their conscience, he breaks away from his kin. He forgets that this apparent Sisyphus task, could possibly lead them to re-evaluate their disposition and to mend their questionable conduct. Even if this invidious task would fall on deaf ears, at least, he would have tried and acted upon his conscience. Since Siegfried, who represents West Germany’s younger generation, contents himself with eternal flight, “einem Weg, von dem man wußte, daß er woher kam, aber nirgends wohin führte,” his self-imposed question, “Meisterte ich das freie Leben?,” has to be negated (GW 2: 502).

As can be deduced from the analysis above, Koeppen criticizes West Germany’s younger generation for neglecting their freedom. The author concedes that it will not be easy to settle the intergenerational conflict and that Germany’s socio-political situation is alarming. Nonetheless, Koeppen proposes to the younger members of society to overcome their fatalism and at least try to set things straight. Rather than forsaking the older generation, the author proposes to seek communication. He admonishes his younger contemporaries to overcome their egoism and cynicism and suggests acting freely upon their concerns and what they perceive as right and good. I will expand upon this subject matter in chapter three.
Chapter Two: Beacons of Truth and Morality

In this chapter I will demonstrate the similarities in Koeppen’s and Pascal’s thinking and writing. Since I will discuss religious matter in chapter four, I will limit the scope of my thematic analysis to the two authors’ existential and ethical bodies of thought. It is my contention that Koeppen’s high regard for the French philosopher not only sprang forth from Pascal’s existential thoughts but also his actions. That said, I will begin my analysis with a discussion of The Provincial Letters, which are Pascal’s concrete intervention in the main controversy of seventeen-century French intellectual discourse. In these letters the author raises his voice in defense of truth and morality. This honorable endeavor certainly contributed to Koeppen’s high regard for the seventeen-century writer. However, to prove that a good amount of the trilogy’s philosophical dimension can be traced back to Pascal’s existential ethics, I will compare the French philosopher’s Pensées with Koeppen’s postwar novels. My analysis will demonstrate the following similarities. Both authors examine the fundamental aspects that affect, motivate, and define human beings. They recognize the fallibility of human reason, stress the vital interplay of reason and intuition within the human mind, and identify human imagination as an influential mental faculty. They perceive the danger of life styles that distract people from self-reflection and moral deliberation. Both Koeppen and Pascal disapprove of blind despair, i.e., the unfounded despondency of people who exaggerate their depravity and underestimate their abilities and capabilities. In addition, they take a critical stance towards objective knowledge, scrutinize the public sphere and authorities,
object to blind docility and conformism, and radically call for mental and moral autonomy.

The controversy behind *The Provincial Letters*

In order to rectify controversial Christian doctrines and to rekindle the simple morality of the primitive Church, Cornelius Jansen (1585-1638), the Bishop of Ypres, espoused the revival of St. Augustine’s religious beliefs (Coleman 99). However, his book *Augustinus* triggered the main controversy of seventeenth-century France that equally shook up Church, State, and Society (Coleman 96). His Augustinian followers, commonly known as Jansenists, suffered vehement resistance and persecution.\(^55\) Their attempt to lead the Church back to its primal tenets clashed with the Jesuits’ desire to modernize the Church. It is not necessary to explain the theological dispute in detail. It is enough to say that both the Catholic Church and the State regarded Jansenism as a source of religious and political dissidence and opposition (Moriarty, *French Thought* 24).\(^56\) Moreover, the Jesuit order was very influential at the court of Louis XIV, and the king’s personal confessor, the Jesuit Father Annat, prompted the persecutions of French Jansenists. When the controversy reached its peak and the Jansenists’ leader, Antoine Arnauld, was “threatened with immanent censure by the Sorbonne,” the Jansenists requested Pascal’s help (Krailsheimer, *Pascal* 9-10). The French philosopher and credal

\(^{55}\) Alexander Sedgwick provides a detailed account of seventeen-century French Jansenism.

\(^{56}\) As Sedgwick expounds, the Jansenists’ emphasis on the spiritual needs of the individual, their detachment from ecclesiastic and worldly institutions, and their moral and intellectual autonomy ran counter to the absolutist demands of both Church and State (197-205).
Jansenist granted his assistance and wrote The Provincial Letters, a series of eighteen occasional letters that were published anonymously.

The Provincial Letters

To illuminate the highly obscure theological controversy for the general public, Pascal combines in his letters a conversational style “with reportage and dialogue” (Rogers 16). To undermine the Jesuits’ position, he contrasts their duplicity with the simple truth of the Bible and the writings of the Church Fathers (Parish 187). Moreover, to expose the Jesuits’ folly, Pascal spices his letters with irony and satirical elements and, thus, turns the religious dispute into a comedy of human error that delighted the public. Voltaire even regarded the letters as the greatest masterpiece in French prose and as witty as Molière’s finest comedies (Coleman 132-33).

The first three letters satirically address Arnauld’s charge of heresy. Pascal employs the naïve, concerned, yet amused outsider persona of Louis de Montalte to reveal the truth about the Sorbonne’s accusation (Rogers 15). Montalte admits that he was initially misled to believe that the “frequent convocations of an assembly so illustrious as that of the Theological Faculty of Paris” dealt with an extraordinary subject matter. Yet, after making himself “perfectly master of the subject matter,” Montalte tells his provincial friend that the dispute does not involve matters of faith (The Provincial Letters 5-6). He points out that the accused theologian never used any doctrine that is not supported by the Church Fathers but that his powerful “enemies have determined, cost what it may, to cut that ground under him” (The Provincial Letters 24). He states further
that Arnauld “is not a heretic for anything he has said or written, but simply because he is M. Arnauld. This is all they have to say against him. Do what he may, unless he cease to be, he will never be a good Catholic” (*The Provincial Letters* 26). In short, Montalte exposes the Jesuit order as “a counter-reformation powerhouse” that attaches “the label of crypto-Protestantism” to their opponents and maintains that the charge of heresy is not a matter of faith but a plot to silence Arnauld (Parish 183-84). Since the dispute is personal and not a matter of faith, Montalte advises his provincial friend: “Let us leave them, then, to settle their own differences. These are the disputes of theologians, not of theology” (*The Provincial Letters* 27). After Arnauld’s expulsion from the Sorbonne, Pascal changes his tactics from the defense of Antoine Arnauld to the attack of the Jesuits’ impious teachings and practices (Parish 185).

In the following seven letters, the increasingly indignant Montalte ridicules the Jesuits’ lax conception of sin, rebukes their religious practices, and accuses the fathers of justifying the violation of almost every moral principle to accommodate sinners of all sorts (Coleman 118). By means of a fictitious dialogue with a Jesuit, he directs attention to the fathers who “purify” the motives of sinners and “correct the viciousness of the means by the goodness of the end” (*The Provincial Letters* 59). However, Montalte makes clear that the end does not justify the means and that the truth is non-negotiable.

In the subsequent six letters, Pascal abandons the persona of Montalte and responds directly to the counter-polemic of the Jesuits. Accused of having ridiculed religion, Pascal counters:

> What, fathers! Must the vagaries of your doctors pass for verities of the Christian faith, and no man allowed to ridicule . . . the fantastical and unchristian dogmas
of your authors, without being stigmatized as jesting at religion . . . Indeed, 
reverend sirs, there is a vast difference between laughing at religion and laughing 
at those who profane it by their extravagant opinions (The Provincial Letters 
105).

He adds, quoting St. Augustine, that a “‘coldness of style’” would rather “‘set the reader asleep’” and argues that “charity may sometimes oblige us to ridicule the errors of men, 
that they may be induced to laugh at them in their turn, and renounce them . . .” (The 
Provincial Letters 106). By citing their venerated authorities, Montalte not only ridicules 
the Jesuits’ impious writings but also demonstrates that the fathers endanger Christian 
morality by permitting lying, adultery, and even murder in their attempt to convert people 
and to gain allies (Rogers 16). He combats then the Jesuits’ duplicities with quotes from 
the Bible and the writings of the Church Fathers and accuses the Jesuits of worldly pride, 
implying that they rather follow the Anti-Christ’s dictate than God’s command. 57 
Thereafter, he charges the Jesuits with self-love, falsehood, deceit, slander, forgery of 
documents, and the fabrication of sources to discriminate against their opponents (The 
Provincial Letters 150-56).

In addition, Pascal asserts that the Jesuits’ frequently formulate their accusations 
in such a vague manner that it is almost impossible to refute them, and orders the fathers, 
if they do not want to be called liars, to “be silent altogether, or relate and prove all the

57 The following paragraph demonstrates how Pascal undermines the Jesuits position by contrasting their 
views with texts from the Bible: “When a person has given me a blow on the cheek, ought I rather to 
submit to the injury than kill the offender? or may I not kill the man in order to escape the affront? Kill him 
by all means- it is quite lawful! exclaim, in one breath, Lessius, Molina, Escobar, Reginalt, Filiutus, 
Baldelle, and other Jesuits. Is that the language of Jesus Christ? One question more: Would I loose my 
honor by tolerating a box on the ear, without killing the person that gave it? ‘Can there be doubt,’ cries 
Escobar, ‘that so long as a man suffers another to live who has given him a buffet, that man remains 
without honor?’ Yes, fathers, without that honor which the devil transfuses, from his proud spirit into that 
of his proud children. This is the honor which has ever been the idol of worldly minded men” (The 
Provincial Letters 146).
circumstances” (The Provincial Letters 159). Further, he points out that not everyone who combats the Jesuits’ errors and corruption belongs to Port-Royal, the physical center of French Jansenism, and asserts that it is his Christian duty to bring the Jesuits to the awareness of their impious disposition and behavior:

I must tell you that . . . I feel obliged, not being in the least affected by your slander, to make you blush in the faces of the whole Church, and so bring you to that wholesome shame of which the Scripture speaks, and which is almost the only remedy for a hardness of hearts like yours: ‘Imple facies eorum ignominia, et quaerent nomen tuum, Domine-Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek thy name, O Lord’ (The Provincial Letters 161-62).

Since Christians believe that the heart is the seat of faith, Pascal’s reference to the Jesuits’ callous hearts emphasizes their ungodliness.

In the last two letters, Pascal addresses Father Annat, who publicly accused the anonymous writer of the letters of being a heretic. Pascal strictly repudiates the incrimination and demands proof of neglecting his Christian duties, fraternizing with heretics, contradicting councils, and violating papal constitutions (The Provincial Letters 177). He accuses Annat of arbitrary assumptions and faulty inferences and implies that the charge of heresy is highly presumptuous, because it lacks true substance (The Provincial Letters 177). Once again, Pascal denies his personal affiliation with Port-Royal, reassures his readers that he belongs to no community but the Catholic Church, affirms his steadfast faith, and declares his obedience to the pope (The Provincial Letters 177-78). In addition, he states that he fears neither the power of Annat nor the influence of the Jesuit order, because he neither desires nor dreads anything from this world (The
Provincial Letters 178). In other words, Pascal presents himself as a devout Christian whose conduct is not impaired by worldly desires and who solely fears God. Thereafter, Pascal challenges the father and announces in an authoritative voice that Annat has no power over him, because he, Pascal, is a free and well-informed man. He points out that he is neither a priest nor a doctor but a detached outsider and, therefore, an unbiased judge. Moreover, he declares that he is a determined advocate of the truth and that neither mundane relations nor worldly considerations will hinder him from revealing the Jesuit’s errors and schemes that impair Christian morality.\(^8\) Pascal affirms that no human, not even the pope or the king, is immune to error or deception. He indicates that the Jesuits tricked the pope into believing that heretical propositions were found in Jansen’s *Augustinus*, which led to the condemnation of the book and the subsequent persecution of Jansen’s followers. However, Pascal insists that “it is the truth of the facts which render bulls lawfully admissible” and rages: “Not all the powers on this earth can, by force of authority, persuade us of a point of fact, any more than they can alter it; for nothing can make that to be not which really is” (*The Provincial Letters* 204-05). Until the Church officially examines Jansen’s *Augustinus* in a council, Pascal denies Annat the right to denigrate his opponents and to make people believe that the Church is in danger (*The Provincial Letters* 206). Thereafter, he accuses Annat of being blinded by “private

\(^8\) “You may touch Port-Royal, if you choose, but you shall not touch me. You may turn people out of the Sorbonne, but that will not turn me out of my domicile. You may plot against priests and doctors, but not against me, for I am neither the one nor the other. And thus, father, you never perhaps had to do so . . . with a person so completely beyond your reach, and therefore so admirably qualified for dealing with your errors- one perfectly free- one without engagement, entanglement, relationship, or business of any kind- one too, who is pretty well versed in your maxims, and determined, as God shall give him light, to discuss them, without permitting any earthly consideration to arrest or slacken his endeavors. Since, then, you can do nothing against me, what good purpose can it serve to publish so many calumnies, as you and your brethren are doing, against a class of persons who are in no way implicated in your disputes? You shall not escape under these subterfuges: you shall be made to feel the force of truth in spite of them” (*The Provincial Letters* 178).
passions” and asserts that the Jansenists’ doctrines never posed a threat to the Church at large, only to the Jesuit order and their dubious maxims (*The Provincial Letters* 207). Finally, he warns Annat—implying that spreading confusion and lies is the work of the Anti-Christ— that he will strive with all his heart and determination to preserve the Church’s peace and tranquility if the father continues to mislead believers (*The Provincial Letters* 208).

It is not certain why Pascal ceased writing his popular letters. It is likely that he recognized that the Jansenists lacked the ecclesiastical and political power of the Jesuit order to win the argument. A fragment from Pascal’s *Pensées* supports this assumption:

If St Augustine were to appear today and enjoy as little authority as his modern defenders he would not accomplish anything. God has ruled his Church well by sending him earlier, and endowed with authority (517).

Besides, the polemical dispute between Jesuits and Jansenists certainly harmed the reputation of the Catholic Church, which was by no means Pascal’s intention. As Krailsheimer points out in his introduction to Pascal’s *Pensées*, skeptical libertines might have been amused and diverted by the letters but not converted, and seeking agnostics might have been discouraged from joining the Church (xxi). In any case, Pascal withdrew from the socio-political arena and devoted the remaining years of his life to the composition of his Christian apologetic.
A preliminary assessment of Koeppen’s choice of Pascal as mentor

In relation to the *Provincial Letters*, Koeppen’s appreciation of Pascal was certainly manifold. As a writer, he most likely took delight in the French philosopher’s skilled rhetoric—the use of poignant but witty criticism, irony, and satirical elements—that exposed his adversaries’ errors, ridiculed their follies, and undermined their power maneuvers. In fact, like his mentor, Koeppen employed irony to awaken and strengthen his contemporaries’ moral conscience and frequently used literary references to illuminate his subject matter. In addition, the postwar German author probably admired Pascal’s ability to disentangle highly complex issues to make the otherwise obscure subject matter not only understandable but also amusing for the general public, which contributed to the letters’ immediate popularity. Nonetheless, I argue that the French writer’s aforementioned literary attributes have not been as essential for Koeppen as Pascal’s mental and moral qualities. It rather was Pascal’s astute and critical mind, adamant ethics, and his decision to act upon his conscience that contributed to Koeppen’s choice of Pascal as a reliable counselor.

Moreover, considering the docile and conformist attitude of the German people during the Third Reich, Koeppen surely admired Pascal for his determination and non-conformism. The Frenchman looked through the pretensions of two commonly respected institutions, recognized their motives and power maneuvers, refused to pay lip-service, and regarded it as his personal responsibility to eliminate deception for the sake of truth and morality. As a matter of fact, Koeppen followed Pascal’s example and imparted to his readers his belief that institutions sometimes misuse their power and appearance to
convey opinions rather than true knowledge to further their own interests. Despite the concealment of his authorship, Pascal’s risk of being exposed was great and the consequences would have been grave. That said, Koeppen surely respected Pascal for having the courage to publicly call the integrity of the Sorbonne and the Jesuit order into question.

Further, Pascal’s skepticism towards majority opinion and his independent judgment—Montalte consults various theological experts and primary literary sources, reflects upon the controversial view, and draws his own conclusion—added to Koeppen’s high esteem for Pascal. Moreover, the philosopher’s recognition and consequent use of his individual freedom, his decision to place his mental and moral integrity above external worldly demands—“All the influence that your society possesses can be of no avail in my case” (The Provincial Letters 178)—must have made a lasting impression on Koeppen. Likewise, Pascal’s declaration—I am a free, well-informed, detached, unbiased, and determined judge and defender of truth—surely impressed Koeppen, who followed his mentor’s example and called in his trilogy for intellectual freedom.

In addition, both authors directed their reader’s attention to internal and external powers and illuminated how these forces impair people’s disposition and conduct. Among other things, the French writer mentions in his letters self-love, desires, deception, and force. It is my contention that the philosopher’s keen recognition and exposure of potentially harmful inner and outer forces contributed as well to Koeppen’s choice of Pascal as mentor. With the exception of Pascal’s at times sarcastic style, all of the abovementioned aspects re-emerge most clearly in his Pensées.
The *Pensées*

In the following discussion of Pascal’s Christian apologetic and Koeppen’s postwar trilogy, I essentially disregard matters of faith. As Krailsheimer explains in his introduction to the *Pensées*, one of Pascal’s initial arguments is that people’s impetuous attitude and behavior harm their morality, and that he wants to shake them, in particular the libertines, out of their complacency and indifference (xxiii). As a result, the French philosopher’s fragments that treat the human condition and people’s conduct provide ample material for an analysis that does not center on Christian faith. Thus, I find it legitimate to compare in this chapter predominantly Koeppen’s and Pascal’s communication form and method and the moral dimension of their texts.

*Nosce te ipsum*: one cannot understand the world without understanding oneself

Attached to Wolfgang Koeppen’s testimony that identifies Pascal as the wise man of his beginning is an excerpt from Pascal’s *Pensées*, which is in regard to its content a Christian apologetic and in regard to its form an unfinished compilation of fragments that was posthumously published in 1670:

[I]ch lese vor dem Schlafen mit Nutzen, wie ich hoffe, Pascal, den Weisen meines Anfangs: ‘Der Mensch, zu sich zurückgekehrt, bedenke, was er ist im Vergleich mit dem, was sonst noch ist; er betrachte sich wie einen Verirrten in dieser entlegenen Ecke der Natur; und von diesem kleinen Kerker aus, in dem er zu
Hause ist – ich meine das Weltall –, lerne er, die Reiche, die Städte und sich selbst richtig einzuschätzen’ (GW 5: 282).

More precisely, the cited passage is taken from fragment 199, which is a short essay that discusses what Pascal calls the disproportion of man. He spurns in this text his era’s exaggerated reliance on human reason and theories of unshakable knowledge. Pascal explicitly refers in this fragment to two texts by the philosopher and scientist René Descartes (1596-1650), Of the Principles of Things and Of the Principles of Philosophy, and a work by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494), Of All That Can Be Known (Pensées 199). He finds it presumptuous that scientists try to discover the principles of things that the human mind cannot even imagine and that philosophers claim to know it all. To put it simply, Pascal criticizes Renaissance humanists who amplify human potential and objects to Early Modern rationalists’ blind belief in human reason.

Pascal argues further that humans are not the measure of all things; they are “something” but “not everything” (Pensées 199). To confirm his statement, he invites his readers to contemplate the infinity of the universe. He hopes that they perceive themselves as nonentities, imperceptible compared to the infinite vastness of the universe. In this manner, he affirms that the “whole visible world is only an imperceptible dot” and that “inflating our conceptions beyond imaginable space” might not be beneficial (Pensées 199). Thereafter, he asks his readers to contemplate the smallest things they know, to break them down into smaller and smaller units until their imagination is exhausted. Pascal hopes that they will recognize that humans, in comparison to the immense vastness of the universe and “the ultimate minuteness in

59 For references to the Pensées, I will provide the fragment number, which facilitates finding cited passages.
nature,” are a “nothing compared to the infinite” and “a whole compared to nothing” (Pensées 199). In other words, Pascal urges his readers neither to disparage nor to exaggerate their state in nature and their potential. Since “all things are both caused and causing, assisted and assisting, mediate and immediate, providing mutual support in a chain linking together naturally and imperceptibly the most distant and different things,” Pascal argues, based on the infinity of all things and their infinite correlation, that it is impossible for humans to gain absolute knowledge (Pensées 199). In a similar manner, Siegfried, the protagonist of Der Tod in Rom, argues that the human senses are limited and, thus, compromise people’s search for absolute knowledge: “Im Käfig der unseren Sinnen erreichbaren drei Dimensionen kann es nur Zweifler geben” (GW 2: 546).

According to Pascal’s theory of truth, “statements can be known to be true only if they are construed in the total system of truth. To know the meaning of a part entails knowing the meaning of the whole, and conversely... . Man is caught in the middle, unable to grasp the whole and drawn into the whirlpool of minutiae” (Coleman 202). Ergo, Pascal proposes to his readers: return to your self, think about yourself in relation to everything else in this world, and learn to evaluate yourself, other people, and the human collective correctly (Pensées 199). This is in nuce the message of the paragraph that Koeppen cites when he identifies Pascal as the wise man of his beginning. Imbedded in this message is the ancient wisdom “know yourself” (Greek: gnothi seauton; Latin: nosce te ipsum).60

Like his mentor, Koeppen criticizes exaggerated optimism in humanity’s potential and overconfident trust in reason and states in “Sein Geschöpf. Antwort auf eine Frage:

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60 The phrase is attributed to Socrates, who argued that one cannot understand the world without understanding oneself.
Wie stehen Sie zu Gott?” (1951) congruent with Pascal: “Als die Wissenschaft an den Fortschritt glaubte, an diesen allein, nur an das kleine Hirn des Menschen, nur an die 70 Jahre irdischen Lebens, da wurde sie langweilig und schritt ins Leere fort”(GW 5: 230).

In other words, Koeppen denounces modern science’s rationalism, i.e., its disregard of spiritual and moral concerns. The postwar German author notices further that twentieth-century science’s incredible discoveries, such as Plank’s quantum physics and Einstein’s relativity theories, contribute to his contemporaries’ confusion and estrangement from the world they lived in.61 The narrator of *Tauben im Gras* sheds light on this dilemma as follows:

Seine Schulmeisterausbildung hatte Schnakenbach noch ein äußerlich intaktes Weltbild, das Weltbild der klassischen Physik, vermittelt, in der alles schon kausalgesetzlich zuging und in der Gott in einer Art Austragsstübchen, belächelt, aber geduldet, wohnte (GW 2: 203).

After all, the discoveries of physicists, such as “Einstein, Plank, de Broglie, Jeans, Schrödinger und Jordan,” shatter not only Schnakenbach’s classical Newtonian worldview but also his common sense (GW 2: 203). Thus, he ponders ob sein Leben, . . . diese Ich denkende Zusammensetzung chemischer Kräfte, die er, Schnakenbach, für eine Weile war, bevor er wieder in die große Retorte getan wurde, sich nach links oder nach rechts drehte (GW 2: 180).

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61 “By the end of the third decade of the twentieth century, virtually every major postulate of earlier scientific conception had been controverted,” which confused not only laymen but also “the physicists themselves” (Tarnas 356). Einstein sums it up as follows: “It was as if the ground had been pulled out from under one, with no firm foundation to be seen anywhere upon which one could have built” (qtd. from Tarnas 356). As a result of these perplexing discoveries, numerous “scientist began to question modern science’s pervasive . . . assumptions that the intellectual effort to reduce all reality to the smallest measurable components of the physical world would eventually reveal that which was most fundamental in the universe” (Tarnas 357).
As the quote reveals, the former schoolmaster subscribes to a ridiculously scientific worldview that reduces human beings to chemical compounds and overlooks their essence. He sees now “eine Welt, in der Gottes Auftragstüblein aufgehoben war” and perceives God as “Irrtum des Homo sapiens,” as “eine Formel, ein Abstraktum” or as “das Kunststück der Balance” in an ever-expanding world (GW 2: 203). Yet, as the postwar German author suggest, God might not be a figment of the human mind. In any case, he conveys to his contemporaries that finding a sensible approach to existence and the right balance in life is all-important.

Koeppen reflects upon Pascal’s abovementioned comparison of the universe to a dungeon and transforms the philosopher’s figure of speech in Das Treibhaus into a cage metaphor that illuminates how socio-political mechanisms have a firm hold on people:


In Tauben im Gras, Koeppen mentions further the confining force of old habits and family demands (GW 2: 163). Likewise, he refers in Der Tod in Rom to the prison of family values and conventions (GW 2: 469). In this manner, Koeppen signals that all human relations, may they be personal, social, political, cultural, national, or international, exert some form of potentially confining power that needs to be questioned.

Concerned about his era’s impersonal scientism, postwar Germany’s dubious power politics, and his contemporaries’ confusion and mindlessness, Koeppen takes an ethical approach to existence. He stresses in his trilogy, as explained in the previous
chapter, introspection, self-awareness, apprehension of others, and knowledge of how one contributes to the human collective. In other words, Koeppen validates Pascal’s maxim—know yourself and others—and conveys it to his German contemporaries, who wondered how it had come to be that their seemingly enlightened and moral nation had committed such horrible crimes during the Nazi era. On the one hand, Koeppen hopes that his readers will recognize how social and political mechanisms impinge upon their behavior. On the other hand, he wants his contemporaries to comprehend that their own disposition and actions were instrumental to the immoral course of the Third Reich and how they added to West-Germany’s then present defects.

The form of Pascal’s Pensées and Koeppen’s trilogy

At first glance, Pascal’s apologetic seems to be a random compilation of fragments that range from aphorisms, quotations of the scriptures and ancient philosophers to personal thoughts, short essays, and fictitious dialogues. However, as Pascal argues, a straightforward, orderly organized study of mankind would give his subject too much credit (Coleman 148). That is to say, his anti-systematic design serves as an example for the confused state of the human mind. For a similar reason, Koeppen abandons a straightforward discussion of his subject matter and rather uses a labyrinthine composition to stress the complex network of human relations and to illustrate how seemingly disconnected and enigmatic individuals contribute to the chaos of human existence. In addition, one could argue that the trilogy’s highly complex and seemingly chaotic form mirrors the confused mind of Germany’s postwar intellectuals.
The human heart

Pascal’s defense of Christianity deviates from traditional sixteenth- and seventeenth-century apologetics. As Coleman expounds, the former defended the Catholic Church’s authority and the latter followed Descartes’ example and aimed at a metaphysical proof of God (144-45).\(^{62}\) Coleman explains further that Cartesian apologists held that “only science . . . has access to the truth” (145). In contrast, Pascal regards scientific approaches towards God as vanity (\textit{Pensées} 190).\(^{63}\) He claims that the heart senses what reason cannot grasp and asserts: “Proofs only convince the mind. . . Reason works so slowly, looking so often at so many principles. . . Feeling does not work like that, but works instantly, and is always ready” (\textit{Pensées} 821). In addition, as Krailsheimer sets forth in his introduction to the \textit{Pensées}, Pascal believes the human heart to be “the channel for intuitive knowledge, for apprehending pre-rational first principles” (xxiii). Therefore, the French philosopher insists that the truth is not only apprehended by the mind but also felt by the heart (\textit{Pensées} 110).

As already expounded in the previous chapter, Koeppen attributes to the human heart a significant role. Although, the postwar author indicates in his trilogy that not only rational thought leads to the truth but also the human heart, it would be rash to equate his

\(^{62}\) Descartes held that human reason is a reliable source of knowledge and perfectly capable of discerning if an idea is true and irrefutable (Phillips 33-34). To silence his era’s skepticism and to replace speculative philosophy, he espoused the development of a system of unshakeable knowledge (Cottingham 18). Part of Descartes’ aspiring undertaking was his philosophical proof of God’s existence. He failed eventually to provide solid evidence for God’s existence, but his application of rational criteria to construct knowledge initiated a scientific view of life (Moriarty, \textit{French Thought} 51).

\(^{63}\) Pascal admonished Descartes for using God just for the sake of an argument (Mortimer 198). He maintained that the “gift of thought” should be used for the betterment of mankind’s moral consciousness and “not for the construction of ultimately useless philosophical and scientific systems” (Phillips 37). Moreover, he spurned Descartes’ optimistic view of human reason. He agreed with Montaigne’s observation that the human mind is fallible and often subject to imagination (Phillips 26).
worldly and Pascal’s supernatural concept of the heart. Koeppen seems to argue predominantly from a moral vantage point. He criticizes in his postwar novels the Nazis’ unscrupulous disposal of moral values and their heartless persecution of the Jews and dissidents. He suggests that the hearts of many Germans have hardened either by their own evil doings or in self-defense, i.e., in the face of otherwise insufferable events, such as the terrors of war and the Holocaust. Ilse Kürenberg, the traumatized Holocaust survivor in *Der Tod in Rom*, is a good example. The protagonist describes her as “Muse des Tages unter der Maske der Flucht, der Verhärtung, der Gleichgültigkeit (*GW* 2: 483). In addition, the postwar author identifies his contemporaries’ suppression of their feelings and the silencing of their hearts as a partial cause of their intellectual struggle with moral issues. Thus, he indicates at various places in his postwar novels that reason needs to be supplemented by a perceptive heart that intuits what is morally right. For example, Philipp, the protagonist of *Tauben im Gras*, feels the urge to sexually mistreat a young woman. Yet, as he feels his heart grow cold, he thinks “ich will nicht böse werden: kein Herz aus Stein,” and resists (*GW* 2: 218). In contrast, Pascal takes a religious stance. The devout Catholic argues that God is the ultimate truth: He touches people’s heart, which is the recipient of His grace and, thus, leads them to the truth and inclines them to obey His laws, and to do what is right and good. Nonetheless, despite the difference in Koeppen’s and Pascal’s concept of the human heart, both writers recognize the limits and fallibility of human reason and assign to the heart a cognitive role as well.

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64 Moreover, as Krailheimer explains in his introduction to the *Pensées*, Christians believe the heart to be “the seat and recipient of charity” and asserts that only in this religious context does Pascal assign the heart a superior role (xxiii).
Koeppen’s and Pascal’s communication method

One of Pascal’s main concerns is that people do not use their mental faculties to the fullest extend. He points out that they either exclude reason or admit nothing but reason (*Pensées* 183). In any case, he argues that the purely rational mind, which merely works with principles and definitions, gets frequently “lost in matters that require intuition,” while the purely intuitive mind is often subject to speculation and imagination (*Pensées* 512). Thus, he addresses in his *Pensées* the two fundamental faculties of the human mind, reason and intuition, to augment his reader’s mental abilities.

Koeppen recognizes as well that a well-developed intellect and a perceptive heart are all-important for his contemporaries’ conscience and moral conduct. Consequently, he conveys in his trilogy his conviction that reason and intuition are insufficient by themselves and need to be supplemented by their respective counterpart. For example, the postwar German author suggests that people who act on a purely rational level, such as Frost-Forestier in *Das Treibhaus*, are nothing more than indifferent automatons. The narrator introduces Frost-Forestier, the former general of the Third Reich’s Army High Command and present head of West-Germany’s secret service, as follows:

Der Wecker schellte. . . . Aus keinem Traum, aus keiner Umarmung hatte er sich zu lösen, kein Alp hatte ihn gequält, keine Messe rief ihn, er war nicht in Furcht verstrickt. Frost-Forestier schaltete das Licht ein, . . . und was sich im Saal ereignete, war der Arbeitsbeginn in einer Fabrik, die Ankurbelung eines Fließbands, ein Ablauf ausgeklügelter wohlberechneter Bewegungen, rationell

As the quote reveals, Frost-Forestier is an unemotional, impersonal, and excessive technocrat. In another scene, he is described as “Hochleistungsmaschine” and as “raffiniert konstruierter Allesschluckmotor” (GW 2: 296). In short, he lacks what makes a human humane, i.e., a conscience, a heart, and a soul. Considering that Frost-Forestier symbolizes, as Schauer rightfully points out, West-Germany’s reinvigorated military powers, his callousness and moral indifference are particularly alarming (134).

The author indicates further that individuals who act on a purely intuitive level, such as the thoughtless Laura in Der Tod in Rom, rather fantasize than deliberate and, thus, fall victim to their imagination. To mitigate his contemporaries’ indifference or thoughtlessness, Koeppen addresses in his postwar novels his readers’ cognitive and sensitive faculties in the hope of awakening and strengthening their moral conscience. He refrains from a prescriptive authorial method and depicts, as set forth in the previous chapter, various forms and degrees of dubious dispositions and lifestyles. This way, Koeppen hopes that his readers recognize themselves within the displayed mental and moral spectrum, contemplate and become concerned with their own flaws, and act upon their newly gained insight. As it turns out, the common denominator of Koeppen’s and Pascal’s communication method is both authors’ desire to preserve and strengthen their reader’s mental and moral autonomy and awareness.

As Hammond elucidates, the French writer never allocates his audience a fixed role: “Many possible readers are evoked in the fragments, ranging from hardened atheists to seeking agnostics, to fully committed believers” (239). To enhance his audience’s
mental autonomy and to gently correct their moral imperfections, Pascal employs a variety of speakers with different points of view (Hammond 240). Instead of telling his audience what to think, he encourages his reader to form his or her own opinion. As Pascal remarks, this form of persuasion is highly effective, since “we are usually convinced more easily by reasons we have found ourselves than by those which have occurred to others” (*Pensées* 737).

Pascal apprehends that people do not like to be told that their opinions are wrong. Therefore, he touches moral questions from many angles, in the hope that his readers recognize their failure to see things from a different point of view, i.e., that they were not wrong but simply neglected to take other aspects into consideration (*Pensées* 701). Moreover, Pascal adheres strictly to his maxim that the “proper function of power is to protect” (*Pensées* 797). Ergo, he adopts a writing style that “persuades gently, not imperiously, as a tyrant, not as a king” (*Pensées* 584).

For example, he asks his reader why “a lame man does not annoy us while a lame mind does” and alleges that “a lame man recognizes that we are walking straight, while a lame mind says that it is we who are limping” (*Pensées* 98). Pascal refrains from saying that he finds his reader’s ignorance and, thus, unsound judgment irritating. Quite the contrary, he concedes that his reader is intelligent, values knowledge, and is capable of discerning other people’s mental ignorance. The reader, on the other hand, realizes that he or she has to gain as much knowledge as humanly possible and scrutinize his or her convictions, unless he or she wishes to become unknowingly a nuisance to people, who know more about the subject matter than he or she does. As the example illustrates, Pascal employs a subtle form of persuasion that preserves peoples’ mental autonomy over
an authoritarian method that undermines their freedom of conscience. As a result, Pascal’s apologetic turns out to be a mental and moral vehicle that gently directs the reader without diminishing his or her freedom of thought.

Although I regard Koeppen’s trilogy as a mental and moral vehicle that respects and fosters people’s autonomy, most of the time there is nothing gentle about the postwar author’s form of persuasion. The postwar author’s jolting irony and biting sarcasm leave no doubt about on which end of the moral spectrum his fictitious characters belong. Nonetheless, he neither directly instructs his readers nor explicitly offers solutions. In particular, Koeppen’s perplexing intertextual references, such as his allusion to Shakespeare’s Caliban in *Tauben im Gras*, leave the interpretation of the discussed subject matter up to the reader. To solve these riddles, the reader has to search for answers. In this aspect, it is safe to say that Koeppen’s trilogy secures the reader’s mental and moral autonomy and furthers his or her cognitive ability.

Human beings’ dual nature and their propensity to misjudge their abilities

As already mentioned, Pascal subscribes to the ancient maxim *nosce te ipsum*. He elaborates on this principle and argues that introspection and self-awareness are the basis of moral conscience and conduct. Therefore, he insists: “One must know oneself. Even if that does not help in finding truth, at least it helps in running one’s life, and nothing is more proper” (*Pensées* 72). He asserts that only “in a state of complete rest, without passions, without occupation, without diversion,” do we become aware of our “inadequacy, dependence, helplessness, [and] emptiness” (*Pensées* 622). Even so, Pascal
assures that earnest self-reflectivity will lead to the recognition of one’s dual condition, to the realization that one is not only wretched but also great (Pensées 122).

In addition, he explains that humans have the propensity to over- or underestimate their abilities, which Pascal deems to be counterproductive to proper self-knowledge and demeanor: “There are only two kinds of men: the righteous who think they are sinners and the sinners who think they are righteous” (Pensées 562). However, the author alleges that there is “Neither an abasement which makes us incapable of good nor a holiness free from evil” (Pensées 353). He criticizes people who merely praise humanity, those who simply condemn humans, and those who distract themselves from self-reflectivity (Pensées 405). The only people who find his commendation are the ones who “seek the truth with groans,” i.e., self-reflective individuals who realize their strengths and shortcomings, as painful as they might be (Pensées 405).

Pascal states further that it is pernicious to regard ourselves as either angels or beasts (Pensées 121). He argues that people who solely focus on human greatness are subject to pride and vanity, while individuals who exclusively focus on human corruption fall headlong into despair and idleness (Pensées 208). To humble thoughtless arrogance and to alleviate unfounded lowliness, he exposes the two opposing features and keeps contradicting both of them:

If he exalts himself, I humble him.
If he humbles himself, I exalt him.
And I go on contradicting him
Until he understands
That he is a monster that passes all understanding (Pensées 130).
As the fragment implies, Pascal negates excessive trust in human reason and the potential for good. In contrast, he maintains that humanity’s condition is incomprehensible and paradoxical, and stresses that even dogmatists, skeptics, and philosophers cannot sufficiently explain human nature:

What sort of freak then is man! How novel, how monstrous, how chaotic, how paradoxical, how prodigious! Judge of all things, feeble earthworm, repository of truth, sink of doubt and error . . . ! Who will unravel such tangle? This is certainly beyond dogmatism and skepticism, beyond all human philosophy. Man transcends man (Pensées 131).

Pascal implies in this fragment that Descartes’ rationalism, Montaigne’s skepticism, and the Neo-Stoic’s dogmatism have their boundaries. That is to say, humanity’s contradictory nature cannot be sufficiently explained by reason, cannot be improved by moral indifference, and cannot be mastered by the repression or concealment of human imperfections.

Michel Montaigne’s Essais (1580) marked an important stage in French skepticism. He maintained that humanity’s senses, reason, and judgment are constantly deceived by passions, prejudices, and illusions and argued that the unreliability of human senses ultimately undermines people’s search for truth (Mortimer 114-15). Faith was of little practical use for him, since it dealt with the supernatural sphere but not with concrete worldly affairs (Mortimer 101). Montaigne came to the conclusion that it is best to accept mankind’s inconsistency and ignorance and to prudently follow one’s own predispositions (Krailsheimer, Pascal, 29). His thoughts appealed to free-thinkers with a hedonistic lifestyle, as well as to neo-stoic libertines who believed in humans’ ability to master themselves prudently (Phillips 24). However, Pascal perceived in Montaigne’s skepticism, apparent absolution of man’s frailties, and indifference toward salvation a danger (Krailsheimer, Pascal 28). Likewise, Pascal criticized sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Neo-Stoicism, a movement that espoused the revival of ancient Stoicism. The two main exponents were Justus Lipsius (1547-1606) and Guillaume Du Vair (1556-1621). They argued that rational reflection enables humans to overcome distressing emotions, which would help them to endure the miseries of their existence with repose (“Neostoicism”). Although Pascal applauded the stoics for their suppression of passions and their detachment from worldly bonds, he believed that their inner pride was blameworthy before God (Krailsheimer, Pascal 30-31).
Despite anything to the contrary, Pascal concedes that there is a right time and place for everything. Thus he writes: “One must know when it is right to doubt, to affirm, to submit. . . . Some men run counter to these three principles, . . . because they do not know when judgment is called for” (Pensées 170). In his Provincial Letters, Pascal defines the three principles of knowledge as “the senses, reason, and faith” and argues that they have “their separate objects and their own degree of certainty” (The Provincial Letters 204). But, how do people know when their judgment is required? The answer is quite simple. They have to think well. However, the development of a sound mind and a strong moral conscience, which is one of Pascal’s and Koeppen’s aims, is arduous and not always pleasant.

Like his mentor, Koeppen believes self-reflection and self-awareness to be vital for an individual’s conscience and moral conduct. Considering that postwar Germans were in denial–Frau Behrend in Tauben im Gras asks herself: “Warum mit Bomben beworfen? Mein Gott, warum geschlagen? Für welche Sünder bestraft?” (GW 2: 20)–and hid their past and present evil deeds and inclinations from themselves and others, Koeppen hoped to bring his contemporaries to a truthful contemplation of their thoughts, desires, and conduct.

Furthermore, Koeppen affirms Pascal’s concept of humanity’s dual nature. Rather than emphasizing humanity’s potential for good and human reason, which Renaissance humanists, Enlightenment rationalists, and other idealists tended to do, the postwar German author stresses the paradoxical nature of his characters. In fact, both authors’ refer in a very similar manner to human beings’ dual nature. Koeppen writes: “Zwei Seelen, ja, zwei Seelen wohnten in jeder Brust, und mal schlug das Herz mit der einen
und mal mit der anderen Seele” (GW 2: 163-64). Pascal remarks: “Man’s dualism is so obvious that some people have thought we had two souls” (Pensées, 629)

Like the French philosopher, Koeppen recognizes human beings’ propensity to either over- or underestimate their abilities. On the one hand, to combat idealizing concepts of humanity, the postwar German author brings in his trilogy to his readers’ attention that world history is a vicious circle of human irrationality, immorality, and violence. I will elaborate on this subject matter in the following chapter. On the other hand, Koeppen realizes that people who underestimate either their own or humanity’s abilities and capabilities are subject to despondency and irresolution, which he illuminates by means of his protagonists. For example, Philipp, the German writer in Tauben im Gras, is paralyzed by the alleged absurdity of the human existence and cannot bring pen to paper. Keetenheuve, the politician in Das Treibhaus, is convinced of the futility of his personal life and political endeavors, resigns, and commits suicide. Siegfried, the composer in Der Tod in Rom who compares himself with Shakespeare’s crude and wicked Caliban, deliberately ignores humanity’s and his own virtues and believes in nothing and no one:


Considering Siegfried’s despair and nihilism, it is not surprising that the “Schlußakkord” of his symphony sounds “wie ein Zusammenbruch aller Hoffnung” (GW 2: 495).
Moreover, due to the disbelief in his potential, Siegfried’s creativity dwindles: “Ich höre keine Musik. Kein Ton ist in mir” (GW 2: 477). Because of the negative ramifications of despondency, Koeppen suggests to his readers to honestly contemplate their condition, accept the pros and contras of reality, embrace not only their weaknesses but also their strengths, and rectify their flaws.

Potentially harmful inner forces

Similarly concerned about his contemporaries’ epicurean life styles, the postwar author indicates that unreflective people neglect the correction of their shortcomings. For instance, in Tauben im Gras, Messalina and Alexander seek oblivion in alcohol and wild parties. Rather than taking care of their little daughter Hillegonda, the married couple fills their “Lebensleere mit Geräuschen” and chase their “Angst mit Mitternachtsmusik und schrillem Lachen” (GW 2: 216-17). They scrutinize neither their own behavior nor that of others. As a result, they overlook not only their daughters’ needs and forlornness but also the fact that Hillegonda’s nanny traumatizes their little girl with her religious fanaticism. Likewise, Elke Keetenheuve in Das Treibhaus embraces the pleasure principle. Based on her extremely sheltered but authoritarian up-bringing, the protagonist’s young spouse is maladapted to the postwar situation. Elke lacks sensibility about both practical and moral matters. She is not used to think for herself and expects her husband to take care of her. Since he refuses to teach and guide her and she is unwilling to take life into her own hands, the immature young seeks refuge from life’s tribulations in alcohol. As the
aforementioned characters’ conduct demonstrates, unreflective and unprincipled lifestyles potentially harm people’s integrity.

For a similar reason, Pascal argues that humanity’s dignity and merit consists in thought (Pensées 200). He cautions his readers that their ability to think entails the responsibility to think well, which he considers “the basic principle of morality” and necessary for their recovery (Pensées 200). Hence, he laments that people ignore this moral duty and engage in activities that distract them from self-reflection:

Now what does the world think about? Never about that, but about dancing, playing the lute, . . . writing verse, . . . fighting, becoming king, without thinking what it means to be king or to be man (Pensées 620). He points out that people’s impetuous desires and enterprises frequently give rise to disputes, audacities, and wickedness and, thus, complaints: “The only good thing for men is to be diverted from thinking of what they are, either by some occupation which takes their minds off it, or by some novel and agreeable passion which keeps them busy . . .” (Pensées 136). Nonetheless, he warns that people remain blind and ignorant unless they recognize their “pride, ambition, concupiscence, weakness, wretchedness and unrighteousness” (Pensées 595).

Turning to the motives behind human behavior, Pascal points to the human will, desires, and the impact of force. He argues that all people seek happiness, no matter what means they utilize, and that the human will always acts towards this end (Pensées 148). He explains that humans are either driven by voluntary propensities or by involuntary force (Pensées 97). He sorts desires, which he regards as the source of human impulses, into three main categories (Pensées 798). He indicates that some people long for
pleasure, some for knowledge, and others for power (Pensées 148). That said, Pascal admonishes that all the aforementioned goods are not lasting possessions and are mainly based on human whim and weakness (Pensées 28). From his point of view, most humans take great pleasure in the pursuit of external wealth or diversion (Pensées 626). The longing for riches is obvious. Everyone enjoys having financial means. Yet, as the author argues, people simply enjoy various types of entertainment, which includes the accumulation of material goods, because they distract and satisfy them momentarily and allow them to forget their miseries (Pensées 136). He goes on to the pursuit of knowledge and states that intellectual curiosity is often based on vanity. That is to say, people only want to possess knowledge so that they can reveal it to others (Pensées 77). That said, Pascal admonishes his reader most strongly not to use his or her knowledge for matters of pride and reputation (Pensées 120). After all, as the philosopher makes known, people should seek knowledge in order to improve their imperfections.

Furthermore, he illuminates that not only the pursuit of knowledge but also the quest for power is a two-edged sword. The desire for authority, which entails the longing for reputation, respect, and might, is self-explanatory. However, the exercise or misuse of power often leaves people that are subject to its forces no choices. Pascal is quite explicit about power. It is easily recognized, and people not only honor authority but also submit to it, because they fear its force, which is often beyond dispute (Pensées 103). Nevertheless, the philosopher points out that there is a difference between power and tyranny and insists that the “proper function of power is to protect” (Pensées 797). In addition, Pascal affirms that people respect power, as well as knowledge, because it

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66 In fragment 44 Pascal mentions further the longing for reputation and in fragment 978 the desire to be loved by others.
seems to be right and reasonable. Still, he urges his readers to question what is commonly accepted as true or right. Most likely based on his experience with the Jesuit order, the Sorbonne, the Church, and the State, the French writer argues that people and powerful institutions often transform “might into right,” since the truth or right often lacks the power to enforce itself (*Pensées* 103).

Following his mentor’s example, Koeppen indicates in his trilogy that the pursuit of pleasure, knowledge, reputation, and power impairs people’s integrity if their actions are determined by blind desire rather than by skeptical and moral deliberation. Since I exemplified already in the previous chapter how the aforementioned desires harm certain characters’ morality, I will turn now from the individual to a specific social group. Schorschi, Bene, Kare und Sepp represent in *Tauben im Gras* West-Germany’s youth. On the one hand, this gang of excitement-craving and pleasure-driven adolescents illustrates that impetuous and unbound desires damage young people’s uprightness. On the other hand, they exemplify how the youths’ national-socialist upbringing hampered their mental and moral development.

As Koeppen indicates, Schorschi, Bene, Kare und Sepp have been indoctrinated from childhood on. As the following quote reveals, their young minds have been manipulated by the Third Reich’s ideology and propaganda:

... Schorschi, Bene, Kare und Sepp standen unter dem Lautsprecher, standen unter der Kaskade von Worten, Sieg und Fanfaren, kleine Hitlerjungen, Pimpfsoldaten, braunes Hemd, kurze Hosen, nackte Schenkel (*GW* 2: 23).

That is to say, their ability to think and judge for themselves has been smothered. They rather have been taught to obey, to fight, and to die (*GW* 2: 24). Since they were little,
they have been geared to fulfill their function within the national-socialist machinery:
“Sie schüttelten die Sammelbüchsen, rüttelten die Groschen wach, klapperten mit dem
Abzeichen aus Blech. »Für die Winterhilfe! Für den Führer!«” (GW 2: 23). Yet, they
have never been taught to reason. They have been promised a glorious and victorious
future, but in the end Schorschi, Bene, Kare und Sepp’s world falls apart. After
Germany’s defeat, the Nazi values and ideals that have been hammered into their heads
are declared null and void, but their hyped egos still crave excitement, glory, and
immediate satisfaction. Since introspection is foreign to them, they take the easy route to
get what they want.

As the narrator points out, Schorschi, Bene, Kare und Sepp have neither an
apprenticeship nor a job (GW 2: 23). This is regrettable but not unusual for the immediate
postwar years. They could postpone their wants and focus on school, which would be the
right thing to do. On the contrary, they

schwänzten die Gewerbeschule, da sie kein Gewerbe haben, oder doch Gewerbe,
die man in der Schule nicht lernt, . . . das Handwerk der festen Fäuste, die
schließen und fleddern, und die warme Tour, die Profession des weichen Blicks,
der schwingenden Hüften, des wippenden Arsches (GW 2: 24).

They rather hustle, steal, and mug people to satisfy their wants without further ado and go
to the movies, like many of Koeppen’s contemporaries, to distract themselves from the
harsh postwar reality: “In die Engellichtspiele kann man schon am Morgen vor dem Licht
des Tages fliehen” (GW 2: 23). Near the end of the novel, the gang attacks Edwin, the
visiting American author, after his re-education lecture (GW 2: 216). The scene stresses
the young males’ simple minds and cruelty, which Koeppen intends us to attribute to
their Nazi upbringing and war experience. Nonetheless, this violent encounter is tragic-comic and bristles with irony, since Edwin, the representative of conservative traditionalism who stresses the power of the mind over bodily matter, is overcome by brute force.

Koeppen indicates further that not only desires but also self-love and imagination potentially impair people’s perception. For example, the infamous Nazi-general in Der Tod in Rom is subject to self-love. From childhood on, Gottlieb Judejahn hated his insignificance and flaws. Thus, as the narrator ironically states, the little powerless Gottlieb undertakes a pilgrimage to might (GW 2: 442). In other words, he chooses to be a part of a mighty organization to boost his little ego. He hides his low self-esteem, ignorance, helplessness, and fear behind a mask of urbanity, courage, and power. However, the narrator points out that, no matter how “weltmännisch” the former Nazi pretends to be, he remains “der alte Judejahn, . . . der nicht vergessen konnte, daß sein Vater, ein Volksschullehrer, ihn geprügelt hatte, weil er nichts lernen wollte” (GW 2: 408). Throughout his life, he boldly proclaims that he does not know fear (GW 2: 406). Still, he is frightened and just hides his fear from himself and others. During the Nazi era, he was a persuasive impostor, “eine Null, die aufgeblasen wurde” (GW 2: 429). Even after Germany’s defeat, as long as he trained soldiers in a military camp in the Middle East, he still believed in his power: “[D]ie Kaserne hatte ihm die Illusion der Macht

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67 “Imagination” denotes in German either Einbildung or Vorstellung. Although Koeppen takes a negative stance towards illusionary imagination, which denotes Einbildung, he does not object to a person’s Vorstellungskraft. Without the power of imagination, a person cannot conceive his or her possibilities.
68 The religious connotation of this ironic mode of speech is obvious. Gottlieb is neither someone who loves God nor someone who will find God’s love. His so-called pilgrimage does not lead to God the Almighty, who lifts up the humble and faithful pilgrim but to Hitler, the “weithin sichtbaren Gott der Macht, . . . des Teufels auserwähltes Handwerk, eine magische Null, eine Schimäre des Volkes, die schließlich platzte” (GW 2: 429). That is to say, Judejahn’s megalomania beguiles him to join a despicable worldly power that not only violates every Christian tenet but also stands in sharpest contrast to the notion of God’s mercy.
gelassen” (GW 2: 472). But now, as a civilian in Rome, he is a just a caricature of his former pompous self and fears that people will find out “daß er der kleine Gottlieb war und sich Größe angemaßt hatte” (GW 2: 428-29). Moreover, he stifles his conscience and claims that he is not responsible for the course of the Third Reich: “Ich habe immer nur gehorcht, ich habe stets nur Befehle ausgeführt” (GW 2: 428). He does not face the truth, ignores the fact that he is a murderer, and convinces himself that he is merely “ein alter Kämpfer” (GW 2: 468). To give others the impression that he is still a mighty man, he hires a chauffeur to drive him around in a luxury limousine and resides in a five-star hotel. However, his skeptical nephew, Siegfried Pfaffrath, looks through the façade and views his uncle as an utter old fool, which angers Judejahn without measure (GW 2: 557).

By means of Anna and Friedrich Wilhelm’s reaction to Judejahn’s willfully staged spectacle of power, Koeppen reminds the reader of the fallibility of reason and the pitfalls of imagination. In contrast to Siegfried, their skeptical and highly reflective son, the Pfaffraths are blinded by Judejahn’s wealth: “Der Luxus, der ihn umgab, beirrte sie” (GW 2: 488). Likewise, Judejahn’s authoritative tone plays a trick on Anna’s and Friedrich Wilhelm’s minds. They neither recognize that “er ihnen Theater vorspielte” nor question his status (GW 2: 492). Misled by his impressive appearance, they assume that he is still an influential man and, thus, fall for an illusion.

In a similar manner, Pascal argues that human convictions and conduct are influenced by self-love and imagination. He maintains that self-love prevents people from seeing their true self, which they hide from themselves, as well as from others. According to the French philosopher, the self longs for esteem and cannot bear the truth about its smallness, unhappiness, and imperfections that only deserve dislike (Pensées 978). Thus,
the self starts hating the truth “which rebukes it and convinces it of its faults” (*Pensées*, 978). Unable to destroy the truth, the self conceals its imperfections from itself and others and does not tolerate people who notice or reveal these flaws (*Pensées* 978). In other words, people who have an interest in our affection will not tell us the truth but treat us according to our wishes.

Furthermore, Pascal holds that imagination, the “master of error and falsehood,” is humanity’s dominant mental faculty (*Pensées* 44). It “makes us believe, doubt, [and] deny reason” (*Pensées* 44). Moreover, Pascal elucidates that we prefer an imaginary life over reality, that we embellish ourselves in the attempt to impress people, and that we are concerned to make our so-called virtuous existence known to others (*Pensées* 806). In turn, people’s reputation causes our admiration, “the tone of voice influences the wisest of us,” and “love or hatred alters the face of justice” (*Pensées* 44). In short, imagination blinds our senses and prevents us from perceiving the true nature of things. Thus, he assures in a slightly mocking tone that “imagination cannot make fools wise, but it makes them happy” (*Pensées* 44).

To shed more light on the impact of imagination on the human mind, he explains the difference between might that simply has the power and the masquerade of feigned power. For Pascal, soldiers and kings do not have to disguise themselves, since they “establish themselves by force” (*Pensées* 44). In contrast, Pascal points out that magistrates, physicians, and academics would not need red robes, long gowns, and square caps if they would possess true justice, cures, and knowledge (*Pensées* 44). He argues that the real “majesty of such science would command respect in itself” and would not depend on impressive attires to achieve people’s respect and reverence (*Pensées* 44). As
Pascal’s treatment of humanity’s major faculty shows, imagination creates illusions and deceives by false appearances. In other words, people often form opinions based on impressions, without further inquiry into the true nature of things.

In addition, Pascal holds that our personal interests shape our knowledge and impair our judgment. Pascal supports his argument by pointing out that the mind is subject to the will. When the human will wants an aspect to be true or false, “it deflects the mind from considering the qualities of the one it does not care to see. Thus the mind, keeping in step with the will, remains looking at the aspect preferred by the will and so judges by what it sees there” (Pensées 539).

Like his mentor, Koeppen acknowledges the power of the will, which he exemplifies by means of Friedrich Wilhelm Pfaffrath: “Sein Leben dünkte ihm makellos, und das Leben zeigte sich im Ganzen gesehen nicht undankbar gegen die Makellosen” (GW 2: 476). The former “Nutznicker und Karriereschleicher . . . Führergeldsverwalter und Spruchkammermitläufer” is once again on top (GW 2: 412). This time he is legally elected Lord Mayor (GW 2: 477). He is proud of this achievement, wants to forget his dubious past, and longs to preserve his present unblemished reputation. Thus, he willfully covers up the fact that he helped the Nazis come to power and sanctioned their merciless abuse of might. To uphold his unblemished image, he fancies, as do so many of Koeppen’s contemporaries, that he was just a passive bystander and not responsible for the Holocaust (GW 2: 531). Only for a very short moment does he recall his own and Germany’s belligerent past and questions his moral integrity:

Die römischen Kastanien rauschten im lauen Abend. Ob wieder Fahnen rauschen würden? Friedrich Wilhelm Pfaffrath wünschte es sehr, . . . aber jetzt . . . packte
ihn ein ein befremdendes leichtes Grauen vor Judejahns Fahnen, die wieder
rauschen sollten. . . . Pfaffrath schien es nun, als sei er in jungen Jahren vom Weg
abgekommen, als habe es einen anderen Pfad für ihn und Deutschland gegeben
als die Heerstraße, die Pfaffrath gegangen war; . . . das andere Deutschland war
für immer versäumt worden. Die Kastanien erzählten sich von seiner Feigheit,
seiner Untreue, seinem Versagen . . . (GW 2: 562-63).

However, the narrator ironically remarks that “die Schuldstimme der Nacht” will pass
and “nach erquickendem Schlaf wird Pfaffrath sich wieder makellos fühlen, ein
aufrechter deutscher Mann und Oberbürgermeister,” free of any guilt (GW 2: 562). De
facto, the admission of his blameworthiness would not be in his best interest, since it
would ruin his unblemished public image. However, Pascal would define Friedrich
Wilhelm as weakling: “Weaklings are those who know the truth, but maintain it only as
far as it is in their interest to do so, and apart from that forsake it” (Pensées 740).

Pascal’s perspective on the human mind is eye opening and certainly helped
Koeppen to understand his era’s mental and moral deficiencies. He came to see that many
of his contemporaries—ranging from former Nazis and their supporters to postwar
politicians, cultural representatives, and common people—were unreflective and
dominated by desires, self-love, imagination, and personal interests, which hampered
both their cognitive perceptions and morality.
Potentially harmful outer forces

Pascal not only regrets that most people’s views are faulty (*Pensées* 92). He also points out that majority opinion is dangerous, because it is supported by a huge body of people. He explains that the opinion of the majority “is strong enough to command obedience, but it is the opinion of those who are least clever” (*Pensées* 95). He maintains that power dominates people and creates opinion, but that it is the opinion of the majority that takes advantage of the power of the mass (*Pensées* 554). Thus, he ironically states: “To be easy going can be a fine thing. . . . Why? Because anyone who wants to dance the tightrope will be alone, and I can get together a stronger body of people to say that there is nothing fine about it (*Pensées* 554). Pascal points out that the majority of people just want to follow and oppose non-conformity (*Pensées* 88). Yet, he regards people’s docility—their desire to conform and their tendency to blindly follow majority opinion or authority—not only as vice but also as a peril (*Pensées* 187). He strongly disapproves of uncritical and mentally dependent people who ignore their moral responsibility to think well. Although we might be taken aback when a multitude of people mock our opinions and principles, Pascal insists that we are obligated to give our judgment preference over the opinion of other people, no matter how precarious and difficult that might be (*Pensées* 99). His *Provincial Letters* are the best proof of his commitment to this maxim.

Pascal’s perception of absolutist power systems, their support network, and their dubious tactics certainly derived from the vehement opposition of the Jesuits, the Sorbonne, the Church, and State to the Jansenists’ mental and moral autonomy, which posed a threat to their authority. As it appears, the French philosopher understood very
well that powerful establishments are capable of manipulating the truth and knowledge in their own interest. In order to do so, these agencies need a vast number of supporters that help the organization to come to power and to stay in power. Besides, Pascal recognized that mainly their respective support groups enabled powerful organizations to deploy the power of the multitude. Therefore, I interpret Pascal’s impeachment of the rightfulness of power, the truthfulness of knowledge, and the soundness of majority opinion not only as an attempt to discredit the misuse of authority, the falsification of knowledge, and the exploitation of majority opinion. I also understand the French writers’ aforementioned censure as an attempt to strengthen his contemporaries’ awareness and to buttress their mental and moral autonomy. In other words, the philosopher hopes that his readers detach themselves from a power network that makes them subject to external demands.

Furthermore, Pascal urges his readers not only to question influential and commonly respected institutions but also the collective’s ingenuousness and forthrightness. He maintains that self-love causes people to hate the truth, to embellish their imperfect selves, and to reject individuals who tell them the truth (Pensées 978). The philosopher argues that people mutually deceive each other under the pretense of civility, which not only interferes with their search for truth but also impairs their morality (Pensées 978). Pascal apparently addresses in this fragment complacent libertines who place an immoderate value on sociability and states in a morally challenging manner that “human life is nothing but a perpetual illusion” and “man nothing but disguise, falsehood, and hypocrisy” (Pensées 978). If he would be actually convinced that this is inevitably the case, Pascal would contradict himself, which is highly unlikely. Therefore, I interpret his statements as a plea to his contemporaries to
refrain from self-delusion and mutual deception and to be true to themselves and honest with each other rather than living up to the morally questionable code of French honnêteté.

Pascal’s attempt to stimulate his contemporaries’ conscience and to strengthen their mental and moral autonomy must have made an exceptional impression on Koeppen. In contrast to the French philosopher, the postwar German author recognized only in retrospect that his own and his contemporaries’ insufficient intervention had not only granted the Nazis power but also condoned their immoral tactics. Nonetheless, Pascal’s keen perception and revelation of socio-political mechanisms had surely sharpened Koeppen’s sense for relations of all sorts. Concerned about West Germany’s political development and power tactics, the author picks up Pascal’s aforementioned tightrope metaphor to illuminate the hampering effect of majority opinion.

The protagonist of Das Treibhaus indicates that organizations and institutions deploy at times the power of the multitude when he states: “Die Mehrheit . . . ist doch ein kleiner Tyrann, und während sie herrscht, ist die Minderheit ein für alle mal geschlagen” (GW 2: 361). Koeppen refers in this passage to the difficulties of Germany’s Social Democratic Party (SPD) to win polls and to have an actual say in politics. In short, Konrad Adenauer operated with a broad coalition, “determined to exclude only the SPD from power . . . to get his military policies ratified” (Pulzer 61). The chancellor took every opportunity to assign key posts to members of his own party, the Christian

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69 Likewise, Heinz, Carla Behrend’s son in Tauben im Gras calls to attention that majority opinion often discourages people from doing what is right. Washington Price, “der schwarze Ernährer der Familie, die gabenspendende und dennoch fremde und störende Erscheinung in der Wohnung beschäftigte ihn ununterbrochen. . . Er war freundlich, er war freigiebig, er strafte nicht . . . . Einige machten sich über ihn lustig. Manchmal wollte Heinz Washington verteidigen, aber dann wagte er nicht, eine andere Meinung als die vielen zu haben, die Erwachsenen, die Landsleute, die Gescheiten . . . (GW 2: 74-75).
Democratic Union (Glees 101). To emphasize the political debility of the SPD, which was deliberately brought about by Adenauer’s power tactics, Koeppen alludes to one of the most skilled Greek rhetorician and writes: “Aus der Opposition die Regierung zu ändern gelänge in Bonn selbst Demosthenes nicht” (GW 2: 361). Since Keetenheuve believes in absolute pacifism, he objects to West Germany’s re-militarization. Unfortunately, the politician belongs to the political minority. Thus, he cannot enforce his highly ethical idea and asks himself in a bitter tone: “Aber wer war schon bereit, auf das gefährliche, schwindeln machende Hochseil solcher Ethik zu klettern?” (GW 2: 370).

Koeppen implies further that power, truth, and knowledge are interrelated and that influential institutions might tamper with the truth. For example, the narrator in Das Treibhaus describes the government’s statements as federal propaganda and the news of the Bundespresseamt as “Anpreisung des Tuns der Ämter . . . Verhüllung, Vernebelung und Verschweigung von Ereignissen,” even worse, as abnegation of the truth (GW 2: 267). In other words, Koeppen signifies that the so-called truth of powerful agencies is at times just what they want it to be (GW 2: 275). Moreover, he reminds the reader of the danger of blind conformism and the necessity to question authorities, their transmitted knowledge, and the uprightness of their motives and methods, preferably before they gain a position that enables them to subjugate the masses by force.

In accordance with Pascal, Koeppen suggests that the personal, economical, social, and political sphere of his time is nothing more than a human-engineered illusion and indicates that it is better, for various reasons, not to partake in this dubious spectacle. For example, the film star Alexander in Tauben im Gras deploys in his private life his movie image to embellish his feeble personality, which undermines his integrity. In Das
Treibhaus, Koeppen indicates that the movie industry feeds on people’s wants and creates a glamorous dream world to lure people into the movie theaters. As Keetenheuve observes, “alles spielte sich in der besten Gesellschaft ab, in einer Welt, die es so fein gar nicht mehr gab,” and he doubts that this illustrious world ever existed (GW 2: 331). The protagonist comes to the conclusion that the “Schauspieler auf der Leinwand,” as well as “ein paar Reklamefiguren der Illustrierten und der Werbung” are the only representatives of this distinguished world (GW 2: 331) Since many people prefer the illusionary movie world over real life, Keetenheuve calls the representatives of this dream world in a mocking tone “echte Schattenkönige des Volkes” (GW 2: 331). The term is a fitting oxymoron. Film actors only cast a shadow or image of a person onto the screen and people who prefer a pseudo life, such as Elke Keetneheuve, become shadows of their true self. The protagonist mentions his spouse’s daily “Filmbesuche, wo der Teufel einem in molliger Dunkelheit das Leben gegen ein Pseudoleben tauscht, die Seele von Schatten vertrieben wird” (GW 2: 234). In this aspect, the venerated actors are indeed true kings of shadows.

Moreover, Koeppen indicates that the glamorous movie world increases simple-minded people’s expectations. For example, the narrator of Tauben im Gras points out that the daughter of Mrs. Behrend’s housekeeper

war hungrig nach dem Leben, wie es ihr Filme zeigten, sie war eine verwunschene Prinzessin, zu niederem Dienst gezwungen. Sie wartete auf den Messias, die Hupe des Erlösers, den Millionärssohn im Sportwagen, den Frackträger der Cocktail-Bar, das technische Genie, den vorausschenden
Konstrukteur, den Knock-out-Sieger über die Zurückgebliebenen, die Feinde des Fortschritts, Jung-Siegfried (GW 2: 18).

Likewise, Schorschi, Bene, Kare, and Sepp, the abovementioned juvenile delinquents in Tauben im Gras, expect a more glorious and adventurous life, just like the ones they see in the movie theatres. In this manner, the postwar author suggests that his contemporaries simply wait for a great life and, thus, forget to give the only life they have substance (GW 2: 333). In a similar vein, Pascal argues that we always look to the past or to the future and throw the present away because it hurts us too much, and that we therefore “never actually live, but hope to live” (Pensées 47).

In addition, Koeppen points out through the voice of Keetenheuve in Das Treibhaus that the newly-founded Federal Republic’s so-called economic miracle is not as miraculous as his contemporaries want it to be. The protagonist states that the economy—“ein mächtiger Zauberer”—creates a myriad of goods and is pleased, „daß der Mensch diese Dinge begehrte und für sie arbeitete, für sie mordete, stahl, betrog,” which implies that postwar Germans’ materialism impairs their moral soundness (GW 2: 338). Since people might fall for the illusion of needs and become subject to the economy, as well as victim of their desires, Keetenheuve suggests: “Nicht mehr mitspielen, nicht mitmachen, den Pakt nicht unterschreiben, kein Käufer, kein Untertan sein” (GW 2: 339).

Moreover, the social group that comes to Siegfried’s world premiere casts the deceitfulness of the public sphere into bright light. Seemingly distinguished individuals create a shimmering illusion of sophistication and prance with their feigned virtues. Yet, as the protagonist of Der Tod in Rom points out, people’s true intentions are to climb the social ladder and to further either their businesses or their careers.
Koeppen questions further the forthrightness of the political sphere. For example, Keetenheueve, the protagonist of Das Treibhaus deplores the dramaturgical aspects of the political machinery. He calls his colleagues in a mocking tone “Statisten der politischen Bühne” that spread lies (GW 2: 264). Likewise, he suggests that ministers are often times “hervorragende Mimiker” (GW 2: 329-30). In a similar pejorative manner, he describes the parliament as a stage and the chancellor as an actor and film director, who assigns his team players their part in the spectacle, and defines his speech as “oratorisches Theater” (GW 2: 367).

In short, Koeppen follows Pascal’s example and indicates that human life is an incessant chimera if people prefer an imaginary life over reality, create delusive selves, and fall for illusive needs and fabricated truths. Consequently, Koeppen hopes that his readers will refrain from self-deception and misleading others, detach themselves from socio-political mechanisms that might harm their integrity, and rather live a self-determined and meaningful life that is guided by steadfast morals.

All in all, Koeppen’s perception and presentation of human existence correlate in many aspects with Pascal’s observation and discussion of humanity. Both writers avoid a straightforward discussion of the human condition. While the German author employs a fragmentary and maze-like composition to exemplify how seemingly disconnected and enigmatic individuals contribute to the complexity and chaos of human life, the French philosopher utilizes a complex, scattered design to demonstrate the confused state of the human mind. Analogous to Pascal, Koeppen prefers a communication method that respects his readership’s mental autonomy over an omniscient and imperious approach that undermines people’s freedom of thought.
Koeppen rejects idealizing perceptions of human aptitude, such as the blind belief in humanity’s rationality and potential for good, and rather stresses, just like his mentor, humankind’s dual nature and the limits and fallibility of the human mind. Both writers disclaim the primacy of reason over the sensitive faculty of the human mind and assign to the human heart a cognitive role as well. In agreement with Pascal, Koeppen points out that his contemporaries misuse reason and intuition to the extent that they either get lost in rational criteria or in speculation and imagination without getting any closer to the truth. Thus, he reminds his readers to listen to their heart when their mind gets entangled in intricate moral issues.

Koeppen and Pascal affirm that humans are ultimately responsible for their actions, because they are endowed with reason, intuition, and a moral conscience, no matter if they make use of these faculties or not. To improve their contemporaries’ perception, both writers address their readers’ cognitive and sensitive faculties to strengthen their mental awareness and moral conscience, which they apparently find insufficiently developed. In accordance with the French philosopher, Koeppen signifies that truthful self-knowledge is a crucial propaedeutic to morality. Hence, he frowns upon people who either shamelessly amplify or unreasonably depreciate their abilities, let alone people who distract themselves from self-reflectivity. Only introspective individuals who embrace the truth, recognize their dual condition, and mend their flaws seem to find Koeppen’s and Pascal’s assent.

In addition, the postwar German author shares Pascal’s perception of inner and outer forces. Like Pascal, Koeppen imparts to his readers that the human will, self-love, imagination, and personal interests are capable of blinding people’s mind, affecting their
judgment, and impairing their moral conduct. Consequently, he hopes that his readers will question their mental perceptions and scrutinize their desires, motives, and behavior patterns on behalf of their integrity and autonomy.

In alignment with Pascal, Koeppen implies that his contemporaries’ knowledge has been conditioned by ruling organizations, social groups, and conventions that have transmitted deceptive convictions. Therefore, he wishes his readers to refrain from blind docility and conformism and search independently for the truth and rely on their personal judgment. Both writers recognize that humans are part of a collective and influenced by outer forces. Nonetheless, they appeal to their contemporaries’ conscience and hope that they will place their intellectual and moral integrity above external demands.

Koeppen’s deviation from his initial mentor

Despite the apparent similarities in the two authors’ way of thinking and writing, Koeppen did not merely adopt Pascal’s form of persuasion and body of thought. To say the least, Koeppen is ambiguous in respect to religious matters. Pascal’s *Pensées* leaves no doubt about the author’s firm belief that having faith in God and living a devout life constitute the supreme form of being, which is certainly appropriate for a Christian apologetic. In contrast, a fictional novel does not oblige Koeppen to take a particular stance and allows the author to offer a multiplicity of thoughts and various ethical forms of being without giving explicit preference to the religious way of life. I will expand on this subject matter in chapter four.
In addition, Pascal’s discussion of the human condition is still rather generic. Although the French philosopher negates abstract, system-based philosophical inquiries, the single individual’s unique humanness still disappears in the human collective that he criticizes. He talks in his apologetic about skeptics, dogmatists, scientists, philosophers, Jesuits, and other groups without describing even one concrete individual in a specific situation with his or her very own set of problems and coping mechanisms. In contrast, Koeppen chooses a literary genre—the novel—that supports the portrayal of a multitude of fully fledged and colored individuals. He utilizes interior monologues and streams of consciousness to expose his characters’ otherwise hidden selves. He describes how each individual suffers, each person’s very own inconsistent and paradoxical behavior, and each character’s unique struggle with life and getting things right. In short, Koeppen personifies, in a manner of speaking, philosophical ideas. Along these lines, he brings in his trilogy abstract theory closer to life.

Moreover, the religious philosopher seems to assign to human beings no unique purpose apart from God and presents to his reader a rather opaque concept of self. On the one hand, Pascal points out that the self originates in a person’s thoughts, which calls Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum* to mind (*Pensées* 135). On the other hand, he maintains that we love a person’s inner and outer qualities but not the self per se, “for I could lose these qualities without losing my self” (*Pensées* 688). Moriarty explains Pascal’s concept of self as follows: Our soul or “metaphysical self . . . is not the self we display to others or experience in our own relationship with ourselves” (*French Thought* 147). It is rather “an imaginary substance, of which the real substance, the soul, is simply the inaccessible support” (Moriarty, *French Thought*, 150). In contrast to Pascal, the postwar German
author clearly stresses in his trilogy the individual’s thinking, feeling, and acting “I” that constitutes his or her self. Moreover, Koeppen does not make selfhood inevitably dependent on a relationship to God. He rather offers faith as one possible way to become a self. I will expand on these aspects in chapter three.

In addition, Koeppen’s concept of freedom is more pronounced than Pascal’s. The philosopher’s notion of freedom comes to the fore in *The Provincial Letters*. In his seventeenth letter, the author admonishes Annat and announces that he is a free man, an intellectually and morally autonomous person, who forbids personal and professional relationships and worldly authorities to determine his judgment (178). However, he states neither in his *Provincial Letters* nor in his *Pensées* that a person can freely develop his or her unique potential or freely determine his or her own life. However, one has to keep in mind that Absolutism was the legitimate form of power in seventeenth-century France. Neither the State nor the Church tolerated dissidents and opponents but crushed them with their power.

Nonetheless, Pascal asserts to the reader that people are free to form their own opinion. That is to say, the individual’s inner self is free. Although Pascal demands in his *Pensées* that everyone should place his or her conscience above external forces and their demands, it is not clear how the general public could have acted upon their moral convictions in practice. To be able to act upon his moral principles, even Pascal, an aristocrat and highly respected mathematician and physicist, had to publish his *Provincial Letters* under a pseudonym and in utmost secrecy. In other words, Pascal’s concept of freedom seems to be confined to a person’s control of his or her mental and moral inner state.
In contrast, Koeppen’s idea of freedom transcends freedom of thought and conscience and involves not only freedom from internal and external constraints but also deliberate choice and, most of all, the continuous and resolute substantiation of personal principles in the world. In other words, rather than stressing freedom from forces, Koeppen emphasizes the freedom to determine one’s actions and to actualize one’s unique potential.

Closing remarks

Based on my findings, it is my contention that Koeppen’s choice of Pascal as mentor derived from the philosopher’s critical stance toward rationalism and scientism, his sagacious understanding of human nature, and his adamant moral principles. In contrast to his era’s abstract, impersonal, mathematical, and mechanistic examination of life and its exaltation of human reason, the seventeenth-century French philosopher stressed the fallibility of the human mind and insisted on an ethical approach to existence, and so did Koeppen.

For what had started in the Early Modern period as a triumph of the human rational intellect for the sake of humanity’s progress had culminated during Koeppen’s lifetime in Germany’s callously rationalized, meticulously calculated, and systematically executed mass murder of the Jewish people. In short, under the pretense of a pseudo-science for the sake of the nation’s racial hygiene, rationalism had gotten the better of German reason. Germany’s disposal of ethical concerns for the so-called good of its people backfired after the collapse of the Third Reich. Nothing seemed to be certain;
nothing seemed to have meaning. Skepticism was certainly the first step in the nation’s healing process, but Koeppen clearly perceived that doubting everything would lead to a deadlock. Pascal’s perspicacious understanding and revelation of human nature and relations and his uncompromising moral principles made him a trustworthy guide for Koeppen, who searched for sure ways and means to amend his contemporaries’ mental and moral deficiencies. Even so, one crucial question arises: why did the postwar German author give precedence to Kierkegaard, whom he called the wise man of his life? I will answer this question in the following chapter.
In this chapter, I will briefly discuss the emergence of existentialism and the movement’s impact on Koeppen and his trilogy. Thereafter, I will explain why the postwar German author preferred Kierkegaard over Pascal as a mentor and reveal the common denominator of Koeppen’s and the Danish philosopher’s literary objective and communication method, as well as their related understanding of human existence. Since it is my contention that many of the trilogy’s existential riddles and questions can be clarified by means of Kierkegaard’s existential ethics, I will use the Dane’s philosophy as an interpretive guide. In focus will be Koeppen’s stance towards mere being, anxiety, and despair and his protagonists’ self-corruption and their misuse of freedom. Considering the prolific volume of Kierkegaard’s writings and the depth and breadth of philosophical thought that it incorporates, I will base my analysis on the works of scholars who are known for their philosophical expertise.

The emergence of existentialism

In the twentieth-century, after two devastating world wars, humanity’s confidence in its powers, potential, and progress took a stumble and yielded to feelings of uncertainty, incapability, alienation, affliction, meaninglessness, and futility. This unsettled Welt- und Zeitempfinden found a voice in existentialism, a philosophical and literary phenomenon that thrived in the 1940s and 1950s in Europe. Representatives of this movement took a stand on existence and talked about human struggle, distress, fear,
and forlornness and addressed humanity’s mortality, “spiritual emptiness,” and “the void of absolute values” (Tarnas 389). Existentialists challenged the traditional idea that life has an inherent meaning and rather argued that human beings have no predetermined essence. As Sartre put it, “existence precedes essence . . . . It means that, first of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and, only afterwards, defines himself” (qtd. from Marino, introduction, xiii). Existentialists maintained that everything was “contingent,” and in order to be “authentic one had to admit, and choose freely to encounter the stark reality of life’s meaningless. Struggle alone gave meaning” (Tarnas 389). Some existentialists, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone Beauvoir, and Albert Camus, rejected the notion of God as the originator and ruler of the universe. Others, such as Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Jean Wahl, Gabriel Marcel, and Miguel de Unamuno, perceived an “underlying plan” in life (Marino, introduction, xiv). Despite their differences, both atheistic and theistic existentialists agreed on one thing: human beings become who they are through their choices and actions (Marino, introduction, xiv). However, as I will explain below, this view was not a novelty.

Koeppen and existentialism

The reception of Kierkegaard, the so-called father of existentialism, had taken place at the beginning of the twentieth century, and his body of thought influenced the emerging existentialists to a large degree. For example, Heidegger plundered Kierkegaard’s intellectual property in Sein und Zeit (Poole 51-52). His concepts of Dasein and Geworfensein are “drawn directly from Kierkegaardian analysis of dread.”

For a detailed account on Kierkegaard’s reception see Roger Poole.
Likewise, Sartre’s concepts of nausea, anxiety, and freedom, as set forth in his philosophical treatise *L’Être et le Néant* are derived from Kierkegaard’s writings (Poole 54). In any case, the nineteenth-century existential philosopher, whose works were read by many German postwar intellectuals, made also a lasting impression on Koeppen.

Without a doubt, the postwar German author responded to his era’s unbalanced *Welt- und Zeitempfinden* and participated in the postwar existential discourse. Like other twentieth-century existentialist writers, Koeppen addressed in his trilogy human disorientation, estrangement, anxiety, despair, and nihilism and delivered a daunting account of the flux of postwar life, the lack of moral and spiritual constants, and people’s struggle with giving life meaning. His emphasis on the self and human freedom is also a typical feature of existentialism. Koeppen sympathized with his contemporaries’ existential crisis. However, unlike many proponents of twentieth-century existentialism, he did not hold that struggle per se gives meaning to life. In line with postwar Germany’s cultural elite, he was rather concerned about his era’s despair and nihilism and searched for ways and means to guide his contemporaries out of what he perceived as a mental, moral, and spiritual impasse.

The existential movement certainly caught Koeppen’s attention, but he firmly alleged in an interview with Thomas Richner that neither Heidegger nor Sartre had a decisive influence on his perception of existence. In search for guidance, Koeppen rather turned to Kierkegaard, the “Weisen seines Lebens” (Richner 105). One hundred years before existentialism emerged and flourished as a cultural movement, the Danish philosopher had already addressed human suffering, mortality, uncertainty, anxiety, guilt, and hopelessness. He had talked about the absurdity of life and people’s spiritual
emptiness. He had stressed the individual, freedom, and ethical choice and had shown how to overcome angst, despair, and nihilism and how to give life meaning. Thus, Kierkegaard proved to be a most valuable mentor to Koeppen.

Koeppen’s preference of Kierkegaard

As set forth in the previous chapter, Pascal’s discussion of human existence is rather abstract. Although the French philosopher avoided a systematic and objective study of humanity, his individual is still generic and disappears in the collective. This is not the case in the writings of Søren Aabye Kierkegaard. In an epoch that idealized reason, abstract thinking, objectivity, and the amorphous collective, Kierkegaard took a passionate subjective position and placed the existing individual at the center stage of his writings. He created a poetic philosophical corpus that stresses self-development, personal choice, passionate commitment, self-responsibility, and individual freedom. Furthermore, he communicated existential issues in a way that offers practical wisdom to the crisis-ridden individual, “knowledge of how to live and what to do” (Solomon, From Rationalism to Existentialism 78).

Kierkegaard’s journals demonstrate that he had read Pascal and held the French philosopher in high regard (Maia Neto 83). Thus, it is not surprising that Pascal’s and Kierkegaard’s existential thoughts share a common ground.71 Even so, I will demonstrate in this chapter that Kierkegaard’s concepts of self and freedom, which are more advanced than Pascal’s, provided Koeppen with an insight of what it means to be a self and what it takes to achieve true freedom, which certainly prompted Koeppen to give Kierkegaard

71 For a more detailed account on the subject matter see Maia Neto.
preference over Pascal. The following analysis will shed light on the subject matter

Koeppen’s and Kierkegaard’s literary objective

As the following excerpt from “Schreiben als Zustand,” an interview with Christian Lindner, demonstrates, the postwar German author hoped to induce with his writings a change of people’s consciousness and life:

Was ich mir wünsche: daß durch mein Schreiben eine Änderung von Leben, von Denken, von Bewußtsein eintrüte bei irgend jemand und sich diese wieder auf einen anderen übertragen würde.72

Moreover, as specified in chapter one, it is essential to Koeppen “die Ohnmacht so zu schildern, daß der Ohnmächtige aufsteht” (Lindner “MeinTag ist ein großer Roman” 81). Koeppen’s literary intentions—to bring about consciousness, a sense of capability, and a change in people’s life—align with Kierkegaard’s objectives. On the one hand, the Danish philosopher aimed at people’s recognition of their ethical and Christian inadequacy. On the other hand, he hoped to impart an awareness of their moral and religious “capability, capacity, or potentiality” (Stack 94). This endeavor—to convey a sense of an ethical and spiritual potential that is within a person’s power to substantiate—was also crucial to Koeppen, who wished to mend his contemporaries’ insubstantial ways of life and the postwar intelligentsia’s despair and nihilism.

72 The interview was first published in 1972 in Text und Kritik. For a reproduction of this interview see Treichel Einer der schreibt 59.
A subjective and ethical approach to existence

As expounded in the previous two chapters, Koeppen disclaimed his era’s scientific and generalizing view of life and rather embraced an ethical and subjective approach to existence, and so did Kierkegaard. The Danish philosopher criticized that “objective reflection makes the subject accidental, . . . transforms existence into something indifferent,” and “leads away from the subject, whose existence or non-existence . . . becomes indefinitely indifferent” (Concluding Unscientific Postscript 173). In other words, he argued that objective analyses of existence are theoretical, descriptive, and indifferent and neglect essential aspects of individual existence, such as a person’s very own emotional and moral dilemmas, commitment, and choices (Solomon, From Rationalism to Existentialism 84). Consequently, Kierkegaard espoused an ethical approach to existence and developed a subjective philosophy that takes the peculiarities of individuals and their emotional and moral problems into account.

In alignment with his nineteenth-century mentor, Koeppen placed the single individual at the center stage of his trilogy. As already expounded in chapter one, he portrayed a vast number of distinct personae and their emotional, mental, and moral particularities, and described the snares of their respective mindsets and lifestyles. In this manner, he seized what escapes generalizing scientific inquiries, which is the condition and performance of a particular individual.

73 The Danish philosopher opposed in particular Hegel’s systematic, rational, and objective philosophy and his scientific approach to existence (Anderson 4). He reproved the German philosopher for deprecating subjective truth and transforming actual human beings into an amorphous, numeric mass (Solomon, From Rationalism to Existentialism 78). That is to say, Hegel’s philosophy deliberately ignored the distinguishing traits of human beings, such as each individual’s very own feelings, emotions, thoughts, and solely focuses on the universal, i.e., that which is common to all human beings (Solomon, From Rationalism to Existentialism 79).
Koeppen’s focus on the constitution and conduct of individuals is crucial. The course of the Third Reich had clearly demonstrated what happens when people forsake their personal freedom and ethics and turn into a soulless mass that blindly follows irrational and immoral ideologists. Unfortunately, many postwar Germans still tended to identify themselves with the collective and conformed to prevailing bourgeois norms, values, and customs without thinking. On the one hand, the author recognized that his era’s past and present collectivism and conformism smothered personal choice and freedom, which he attempted to secure and foster by means of his trilogy. On the other hand, he realized that hiding behind the collective and conforming to prevailing norms, opinions, and customs allowed people to evade responsibility for their choices and actions. However, Koeppen recognized that it is possible to grasp neither the immorality of the Third Reich nor the dubious development of the postwar era without taking a critical look at the mindset and actions of the single individual. For, as he suggests through the voice of the narrator in Tauben im Gras, people’s actions in the here and now create history for which they are responsible:


In other words, Koeppen hoped to initiate in his contemporaries the awareness that each one of them had been somehow instrumental to Germany’s infamous recent past and that their present actions have an impact on their country’s future.
Koeppen’s depiction of history

Numerous researchers have taken offense at Koeppen’s depiction of history as a vicious circle of human irrationality, immorality, and violence. For example, Dietrich Erlach repudiated Koeppen’s “fatalistisches Geschichtsbild, in dem sich die Geschichte als sinnloser Kreislauf, als absurde Wiederkehr des Immer-Gleichen erscheint, . . . wodurch jede Bemühung als Selbstbetrug verhöhnt wird” (217-18). However, it rather seems to me that Koeppen disputes with his provocative description idealistic views of world history and humanity’s progress.

In this context, I interpret Koeppen’s depiction of history as an obscure and fermenting sourdough and as an overflowing stream as ironic sideswipes at historical and philosophical theories that stress the natural progress of world history and the human collective (GW 2: 251). Likewise, his description of West-Germany as “Treibhaus” without “Üppigkeit und Mark” ridicules idealized views of the Federal Republic’s development. For instance, the narrator of Tauben im Gras compares history with a stream and inspires the reader to ponder about the cause and effect of past and present events. Every now and then, this stream swamps the country and leaves dead people and reeking mud behind, “eine Fruchtbarkeitslauge,” in which the survivors get stuck (GW 2: 82). Then, the narrator asks—with a good portion of irony that queries the idealism of German Classicism and Romanticism–where the gardener is, when the flowering season will be, and when humanity’s Golden Age will come (GW 2: 82). By means of this passage, Koeppen raises two questions: who is responsible for the course of past and future historical events, and where are the people who eventually bring about a better world view.

Both Herder and Hegel subscribed to an organic worldview.
future? In short, the author knew very well that history is not of “natural” origin but man made.

The following two quotes support my argument. The narrator of *Tauben im Gras* describes history as “unverständlicher erlebte Geschichte, ein Sauerteig, der aufging,” but indicates that the “großen Spieler” of the “Weltstunde” are responsible for both the fermentation process and the baking result: “was für Brot werden wir morgen essen?” (*GW* 2: 81-80). The dough metaphor resurfaces in *Der Tod in Rom* when the narrator compares people’s disposition with dough and asks: “Welcher Bäcker wird [den Teig] kneten, welcher Ofen wird ihm Farbe geben?” (*GW* 2: 393). In this manner, Koeppen indicates that propagators of ideologies, people’s mentality, and the course of historical events are interrelated. Even so, the rhetorical question contains a subtle moral admonishment: no self-aware and self-responsible individual allows others to determine his or her mentality.

In addition, it is my contention that the postwar German author challenges with his provocative description of history his contemporaries’ fatalism and resignation, their belief that they are powerless to change the course of events, such as West Germany’s re-burgeoning nationalistic, fascistic and militaristic tendencies. This dysfunctional and ineffective attitude comes clearly to the fore in *Das Treibhaus* when the protagonist repudiates the “Schicksalsergebenheit” of the German people and their “Gefühl, es kommt doch alles wie es kommen soll, wir können da doch nichts machen” (*GW* 2: 360). Yet, Koeppen certainly agreed with Kierkegaard, who reprimanded people who believe history to be a predetermined process as follows:
What about the theory that the course of world events is an inevitable development . . .? Must it not paralyze all activity . . .? And are those who like this philosophy in a position to resign and let the world go its crooked way, and what is one to think about them? (*Journals and Papers* 4: 1232).

In other words, people who perceive events as immutable tend to resign and neglect their ability to set things straight. Even so, as I have already expounded in my first chapter, Koeppen frowned upon his contemporaries’ passivity and lack of moral sense. How the postwar German author attempted to stimulate his readership’s conscience and vivify their dormant powers and moral potential and how this relates to Kierkegaard’s philosophy will now be of interest.

Koeppen’s and Kierkegaard’s communication method

Kierkegaard characterized his era as an age that stifles personality and obliges the individual to submit to the crowd: “In order that everything should be reduced to the same level, it is . . . necessary to produce a phantom, . . . a monstrous abstraction, . . . and that phantom is the public” (*The Present Age* 59). That is to say, people were expected to fulfill their function in the society and to conform to prevailing norms and opinions for the greater good. However, Kierkegaard found fault with his society’s superficial bourgeois ways of life. Most of his contemporaries viewed themselves as upright moral citizens and good Christians. However, the Danish philosopher observed, like Pascal

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75 Kierkegaard admonishes here Hegel’s view of world history. Hegel understood the course of world events as a necessary, predetermined, and rational progress towards universal freedom and regarded violent and evil incidents as necessary “stepping-stones towards progress” (Beiser 220).
before him and Koeppen after him, that many of his contemporaries were subject to “self-deception, complacency and hypocrisy” and lacked moral and spiritual profundity (Watts 50). He knew that any direct attack on people’s convictions and lifestyles would fall on deaf ears, since it would pose a threat to their self-image and self-esteem (Watts 63). Consequently, he embraced an indirect communication method in the hope initiating in his readers the awareness that their habitual way of thinking and living was unethical and unchristian without activating their defense mechanism.

On the one hand, to constitute a corrective to his era’s rationalism, universalism, and collectivism, Kierkegaard created a series of works that stresses self-development, personal choice, passionate commitment, self-responsibility, and individual freedom. On the other hand, he gave these texts a fictional outlook and published them under various pen-names. The reason for publishing various works pseudonymously was twofold. First, Kierkegaard concealed his authorship to undermine his own authority in order to impede the transformation of his personal thoughts into objective knowledge or yet another existential theory (Watts 65). Second, by withholding his personal opinion, Kierkegaard protected and supported his readers’ personality by allowing them to acquire their own understanding of the subject matter.

In his pseudonymously published works, he slipped into the role of various personae, such as authors, compilers of essays, editors, and others. The philosopher ascribed to each persona an either aesthetic or ethical or religious unilateral position, which allowed him to describe the pitfalls of each particular way of life in detail (Malantschuk 49-50).76 This way, Kierkegaard caught people’s attention without

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76 Kierkegaard has a triadic conception of life. The three existential categories are the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious way of life. I will explain these alternative modes of existence shortly.
activating their self-defense mechanism and directed his readers to reflect on the presented existential positions, as well as on their own habits and perspective on life.

As already expounded in the previous two chapters, Koeppen neither instructed his readership directly nor offered ready-made solutions. He refrained from an authoritative and prescriptive communication method and rather employed irony to stimulate his reader’s moral conscience; utilized mythological, historical, and literary references to illuminate issues in question; and left the interpretation of the subject matter up to his reader. Via his characters and narrators, following Kierkegaard’s example, Koeppen presented a multitude of negative and positive human dispositions and various forms and degrees of questionable lifestyles that spanned postwar society. This way, Koeppen hoped that his readers will detect their own disposition and way of life, discern their ignorance and self-deception, realize that a self-reflective and sincerely ethical lifestyle might be the better choice, and recognize what it means to be a self.

Similar to the Danish philosopher, Koeppen addresses in his trilogy people that are either ignorant of their mental and moral deficiencies or unaware of their abilities and potential. On the one hand, he aims at superficial postwar Germans who live in the moment and blindly follow their desirers, interests, and inclinations without any moral concerns. On the other hand, Koeppen addresses complacent contemporaries who blindly subscribe to bourgeois conventions, regard themselves as upright and moral members of Society, and question neither proclaimed duties nor the validity of commonly accepted moral values. Likewise, he targets highly reflective, crisis-ridden postwar intellectuals who distance themselves from conventional norms and values, perceive life as meaningless, and suffer from anxiety, shame, and often paralyzing despair without
recognizing the cause of their distress. In other words, Koeppen addresses predominantly postwar Germans who subscribe to what Kierkegaard termed the aesthetic mode of being, which is an inauthentic, immature, and heedless way of life. Since it is my contention that Koeppen accedes to Kierkegaard’s triadic perception of life and self, it is expedient to explain Kierkegaard’s three spheres of existence that correspond to a specific stage of a person’s self-development.

The aesthetic mode of existence

The aesthetic mode of existence is the sphere of “immediacy” and “thoughtless superficiality” (Hong, introduction, x). The aesthete is nothing more than a “diversity” of feelings, emotions, wants, and needs and is “subject to impulses and fantasies” over which the aesthete does not take control (Stack 91). He or she concentrates on the external, i.e., the hustle and bustle of everyday life, and makes his or her happiness dependent on outer circumstances (Allen 60). Within the aesthetic sphere, the aesthete’s awareness, knowledge, and cultural refinement vary from person to person (Watts 192). On the bottom is the pleasure-craving, unreflective brutish person, who merely follows his or her instincts, and on top is the highly-reflective aesthete, who might be a sophisticated intellectual or refined artist, who seeks self-fulfillment and makes full use of his or her talents (Watts 192). Even so, all aesthetes take life as it comes.

When the aesthete reaches the border to the ethical or religious stage, he or she adopts an ironic attitude towards existence and regards all human endeavors as absurd and insignificant (Watts 68). When he or she only takes a detached and critical stance
towards conventional morals, proclaimed duties, and common goods, the ironic stance leads nowhere (Watts 67-68). If the aesthete does not overcome this form of destructive irony by giving his or her life genuine meaning, he or she will adopt a nihilistic and cynical position. Since the aesthete suspends moral judgment and refuses to give life meaning, his or her ironic stance has a paralyzing effect and leads to passivity, indecisiveness, and despair (Stack 36). In the worst case scenario, the spiritually exhausted aesthete commits suicide (Stack 37). In order to leave the aesthetic mode behind, the aesthete needs to take an ironic stance towards him- or herself. By means of self-critical reflection, the aesthete is now able to recognize the inadequacy of his or her lifestyle and the emptiness of his or her spiritual state. However, self-reflection and self-awareness are not enough. The aesthete needs to stop contemplating his possibilities and passionately will moral self-transformation (Stack 92-93).

The ethical mode of existence

The ethical mode of existence is a “life of commitment,” of “striving to actualize” what the individual perceives as right and good (Hong, introduction, x). The ethical person is self-conscious, recognizes his or her abilities and potential, and knows of his or her freedom of will and choice (Watts 199). He or she understands that one needs to temper one’s inclinations, shape one’s personality, and give one’s life direction. The measuring stick of the ethical individual is his or her moral soundness, will power, and passionate engagement (Watts 200). He or she accepts absolute responsibility for his or her past, present, and future disposition and conduct, and persistently strives to become
his or her imagined ideal person (Watts 199). In contrast to the aesthetic ironist or cynic who adopts the stance of an outsider or detached observer, the ethical person is deeply committed to and actively participates in society (Watts 200). Moreover, he or she not only cares about what is best for him- or herself but also takes heed that what he or she does is good for others (Anderson 47). However, the ethical way of life has its pitfalls. First, ethical beings who absolutely comply with universal principles, such as freedom, justice, equality, benevolence, love, and peace, might overlook their personal responsibilities. Second, they might be subject to self-deception and convince themselves that all moral obligations are fulfilled while others do much more for the community (Watts 202). And last but not least, ethical-minded people often fail meeting their own moral ideals, no matter how hard they try, which can be very exhausting and frustrating.

The religious mode of existence

The religious individual perceives that living for God is the ultimate form of existence and, thus, places God above all worldly things. He or she realizes that humans are not perfect, and that it is impossible to meet all the requirements of the ethical sphere (Watts 203). Moreover, the religious person knows that reason stops at the threshold of the religious sphere and that it requires a leap of faith to become a Christian (Watts 203). In contrast to people who adopt a quasi religious position to gain public acknowledgement, the genuine Christian apprehends that a religious way of life does not improve his or her status in the finite world (Watts 204). He or she understands that Society’s norms are only relative values, and that one has to find the right balance
between worldly obligations and spiritual requirements (Watts 203). The religious individual neither dismisses worldly pleasures nor idealizes social responsibilities (Beabout 150). On the contrary, he or she acknowledges that humans are physical and spiritual beings, and that his or her true purpose in life is living in right relation to him- or herself, to others, and to God, which is exactly what Kierkegaard calls the true purpose of a self (Beabout 155).

What it takes to be a self

As Virgilius Haufniensis, the pseudonymous author of Kierkegaard’s *The Concept of Anxiety* points out, a human being is a “synthesis of the psychical and the physical” (140). The mere human being (the undeveloped aesthete) is a passive unity of two diametric poles. The synthesis between the two polarities is a negative unity as long as there is no interaction between the two (Beabout 87).

However, a self-aware and self-reflective person constitutes a dynamic relation between his or her two polarities. By means of reflection, the person recognizes that he or she is a composite being and perceives that he or she is endowed with free will and the ability to choose and form his or her character (Beabout 89). When the person consciously relates the two poles of his or her being to one another and begins modeling his or her character, the self comes into being. The part of the person that chooses to become a particular kind of self or character is “the power of the will” or the person’s “spirit” (Beabout 46).
Although ethical choice is essential for a self to come into being, Anti-Climacus, the pseudonymous author of Kierkegaard’s *The Sickness Unto Death*, argues that a self cannot “be in equilibrium and rest by itself” without “relating itself to that which has established the entire relation” (351). While the ethical individual aspires to find the right balance in life on his or her own, the religious person finds stability by relating him- or herself to God who created him or her as a human being (Beabout 91). Furthermore, the religious person not only seeks the right relation to him- or herself and to others, as the ethical individual does, but also chooses to live in proper relation to God (Beabout 92).

In short, according to Kierkegaard, to be a genuine self means: 1.) to be a self-conscious person who takes all aspects of his or her existence into consideration; 2.) to be a spirit or character who conforms to deliberately chosen principles; 3.) to exist not only as a self in proper relation to other selves but also to live and act in the right relation to God; 4.) to be freedom (Beabout 155). Since Kierkegaard equates freedom with being a self-conscious, communal, and spiritual person who accepts accountability for his or her choices while living and acting in right relation to others and to God, it is beneficial to discuss what happens when people use their freedom improperly (Beabout 92). But, before moving on to a discussion of anxiety and despair as indicators of a person’s misuse of freedom, I will demonstrate that Koeppen espoused Kierkegaard’s understanding of self.
Human beings inherent body-mind polarity

Koeppen’s description of human beings’ innate polarity aligns with Kierkegaard’s concept of self. The postwar German author indicates at various places in his trilogy that humans are not only physical but also psychical beings whose task it is to bring the contradictory requirements of body (impulses, desires, and passions) and mind (reflections, spirit, and soul) into proper balance.

For instance, Koeppen describes the infamous former SS-general in *Der Tod in Rome* as a conscienceless, animal-like being. Judejahn is the undeveloped aesthete par excellence. He is predominantly body and blindly reacts to impulses. He is referred to as a wild boar, an old goat, and a bull (*GW* 2: 410, 558, 525). He is constantly hungry, hoggishly gulps down his food, and satisfies his sexual urges whenever an opportunity arises (*GW* 2: 443, 521). In contrast, the “Denkelektron” Frost-Forestier in *Das Treibhaus* is characterized as an indifferent automaton (*GW* 2: 296). As the narrator points out, the head of West-Germany’s intelligence service is in full control over his bodily impulses and desires: “Sein Geschlecht hing ruhig, wohlproportioniert zwischen den Beinen” (*GW* 2: 242). While Judejahn neglects his mind and allows his body to dominate his actions, Frost-Forestier chastises his body and exalts pure reason. As a result, the former is devoured by passion, and the latter is rather cold-hearted and insensitive. In this manner, Koeppen indicates that humans have to bring both poles of their innate polarity into the right balance. While impulses and desirers should be

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77 As Kierkegaard put it, “this class of animal is not the fruit of man’s and woman’s desire. Like all other lower classes of animals, it is distinguished by a high level of fecundity and propagates beyond belief” (*Either/Or* 1: 260).
tempered by careful and sensitive reflection, cold reason ought to be spirited up by passions. For an absolute dispassionate person is not really human.

Koeppen’s use of animal-metaphors

Many of Koeppen’s peripheral characters are undeveloped aesthetes who neglect their minds. They do not recognize they are able to control their impulses, emotions, desires, and inclinations. Nor are they aware that they are essentially free to choose and form their character. In this context, I interpret Koeppen’s use of animal-metaphors as an informative indicator of the form and degree of a person’s inner imbalance or self-corruption.

For example, in Tauben im Gras, the author refers to people as rats, hyenas, sharks, and amphibians that are barely covered with human skin (GW 2: 42). He points out further that their “Triebe” go on “Treibjagd” and calls it the “Lustjagd auf den weißen Hirsch des Selbstbetrugs” (GW 2: 80). In other words, people frequently and deliberately ignore their libidinal misconduct for the sake of an untainted self-image. By means of warm-blooded-animal metaphors, Koeppen usually implies the reign of uncontrolled impulses and desirers, while he uses cold-blooded-animal metaphors to indicate a person’s lack of passion, feelings, and emotions.

For instance, Odysseus, the American soldier who slays in Tauben im Gras an old man in rage, belongs to the class of warm-blooded animals. Koeppen describes the American as “lendenstark” and “tierhaft” and terms him “King Kong” (GW 2: 40, 30). In contrast, Unverlacht, a pawnbroker in Tauben im Gras, belongs to the class of cold-
bled creatures. He is described as “ein hinterhältiger plumper Frosch . . . mit kalten wässrigen Augen” who lacks compassion for his clients and mercilessly exploits their monetary dilemma (GW 2: 92).

Then again, Edwin in *Tauben im Gras* is “ein seltenes Tier” (GW 2: 44). In fact, the fictitious American author is a rare specimen, since Koeppen portrays him not only as a heartless, old vulture but also as a tasty fish (GW 2: 44, 169). The so-called “Kreuzfahrer des Geistes” is a reflective and refined person who passionately pursues his intellectual interests (GW 2: 179). As the narrator points out, “Edwin hatte sein Leben den geistigen Bemühungen geweiht, er war zum Geist gekommen, er war Geist geworden” (GW 2: 183). Nonetheless, he sustains himself on lifeless matter like vultures do. His knowledge and ideals are exquisite, “ein Extract aus dem Geist der Jahrtausende,” but his message is cold, which explains why Koeppen calls him a tasty fish (GW 2: 45). Edwin believes strongly in the “Zucht des Geistes” and the humanist tradition and has his bodily wants and needs in control (GW 2, 105). However, in spite of his humanistic ideals, he does not act upon them and lacks true compassion for other people’s welfare, which indicates that he is in Kierkegaardian terms a highly developed aesthete but not a genuine self.

For example, Edwin knows of Germany’s “Sturz in die Ungeschichte” (GW 2: 106). He clearly perceives that the country’s “Scheinblüte” is coupled with the “Interessen der Sieger,” politics, and economics (GW 2: 106). Edwin is aware of the fact that it is rather “Wirtschaft” and “Mercurius mit dem gefüllten Beutel” than “die verwirrte Klio,” the muse of history, that dominate the scene (GW 2: 106). Even so, the visiting American author does not tell his German audience the truth during his re-
education lecture but bores them with platitudes. His speech is defined as a “Aufzählung toter Wörter, Grabzeichen des Geistes; Wörter, die . . . nicht zum Leben, die . . . zu keinem Sinn erwecken würden” (GW 2: 213). Although Edwin is convinced that Germany’s stage is set for tragedy, he does not act on his fears and moral concerns (GW 2: 106). Thus, Edwin is not an integrated human being or self but “ein preisgekrönt[es] Tier” (GW 2: 96).

Thinking per se does not make a self

In alignment with Kierkegaard, Koeppen points out at various places in his trilogy that mere thinking does not make a self. For example, with an ironic sideswipe at the postwar era’s existentialists, Keetenheuve, the protagonist of Das Treibhaus, remarks that some people believe to exist, “weil sie Kaffee tranken, rauchten und sich gedanklich oder tatsächlich aneinander rieben” (GW 2: 307). They think about their “Existenz und ihre Existenz im Verhältnis zu allen anderen Existenzen,” but their faces are still “gezeichnet von der Leere, gezeichnet vom bloßen Dasein. Es war nicht genug” (GW 2: 307). In this manner, Koeppen indicates that thinking, may it be banal or intellectual, is not enough. People are still mere beings and remain empty human shells if their thoughts lack profundity, and if they do not act upon what they perceive as true and right. This includes highly reflective postwar intellectuals who lose themselves in endless contemplation of existential issues without giving substance to their lives.
Koeppen’s critical stance toward mere being

Like his nineteenth-century mentor, Koeppen disclaims mere being, an unreflective and heedless existence. As the narrator of *Tauben im Gras* argues, the German people “hatten ihr Leben gerettet,” but they live “ein nutzloses Dasein” (*GW* 2: 26). They merely conform to changed outer circumstances without any concern about their inner state of being:

Sie waren wieder zu Hause, reihten sich ein, rieben sich aneinander,
übervorteilt einander, handelten, schufen, bauten, gründeten, zeugten, saßen in der alten Kneipe, atmeten den vertrauten Boden, beobachteten das Revier, den Paarungsplatz (*GW* 2: 27).

They fill their “Lebensleere mit Geräuschen” and “jagen die Angst” with alcohol and “schrillem Lachen” or let their “trüben Sinne” and “Trostlosigkeit” run their course (*GW* 2: 216).

Further, the narrator of *Das Treibhaus* defines mere being as “Hölle des bloßen vegetativen Daseins, das gerade noch die Pflanzen ertragen können” (*GW* 2: 234). Mere *Dasein* is certainly appropriate to animals, plants, and machines that have neither a conscience nor free will nor freedom of choice and function out of necessity. Humans, on the other hand, are essentially free and able to rise above their physical matrix by means of reflection and will power. Hence, Koeppen deprecates that many of his contemporaries disregard their innate potential.

The theme of mere existence resurfaces as well in *Der Tod in Rom*: “Nun lebten die Leute hier, wagten es, nur so zu Leben, lebten für ihre Geschäfte, lebten für ihr
Vergnügen – gab es Schlimmeres?” (GW 2: 447). It is highly ironic that it is the immoral SS-general Gottlieb Judejahn who complains about his contemporaries’ philistinism and hedonism. At first, one is inclined to negate Judejahn’s rhetorical question. War, tyranny, and any other form of aggression and abuse seem to be by far worse than living for one’s passions, business, or work. Yet, who is responsible for war, violence, and the affliction of other humans? On the one hand, unscrupulous leaders like the SS-general Judejahn who forego moral deliberation and treat others human beings like “Menschenmaterial” are to be held accountable (GW 2: 411). On the other hand, as Koeppen indicates at various places in his trilogy, any external authority needs a support group that establishes its power and keeps it in power. Thus, people who follow every authority, command, call of duty, and commonly accepted norms, values, and conventions without thinking might be the root of the problem. They are responsible for the rise of oppressive and belligerent agents and governments that violate human rights and cause the suffering of millions. From this follows that people who embrace a heedless lifestyle, who are unConcerned about their past, present, and future conduct, not only sabotage their potential selves but also constitute a possible danger to other people’s freedom.

A clear example of a mere being is Elke Keetenheuve in Das Treibhaus. The immature young woman has difficulties to adapt to the postwar situation and is caught in the past. Her father was a wealthy party leader for the NSDAP. She simply obeyed her parents’ orders and enjoyed a sheltered and carefree childhood. After the collapse of the Third Reich and her parents’ death, she does not know what to do with her freedom. Elke is not used to think for herself, has no moral sense, and seeks with no avail distraction from the emptiness of her life:
Sie wußte mit der Freiheit nichts anzufangen. Sie verlor sich in ihr. Das anscheinend pflichtlose Leben war für Elke wie ein ungeheures Wasser, das sie landlos umspülte, ein Ozean der Leere, dessen unendliche Öde allein vom Gekräusel der Lust, vom Schaum des Überdrusses, vom Wind aus vergangenen Tagen belebt wurde (GW 2: 230).

Blinded by his zeal to help his country, her husband fails to recognize Elke’s mental and emotional instability. Since Keetenheuve’s “nie zu fassende Intellektualität” only confuses and depresses his lonely and bored wife, Elke seeks security in the arms of a former NS-Women’s-League leader (GW 2: 234). Wanowski’s authoritative attitude reminds Elke of home, “da war Wärme, da war Vergessen” and, most of all, “da war Schutz vor der Weite, . . . Schutz vor der Ewigkeit, da wurden einfache Worte gesprochen, keine Abstrakta geredet” (GW 2: 234). Despair brings Elke to the edge of faith. Church bells begin to agitate her. She senses the “Anspruch von etwas Absoluten,” but quarrels with God (GW 2: 236). Since her husband denies the existence of God, he aggravates her distress and takes away her last hope (GW 2: 236). She seeks refuge in alcohol and drugs that contribute to her premature death, but “eigentlich hatte sie die Verlassenheit erstickt, eine Ahnung von Ewigkeit und Nichtewigkeit . . . (GW 2: 236).

Since Elke never gave heed to her mind, she does not recognize that her anxiety and despair signify her lack of spirit and will power and her entangled freedom.

Unfortunately, Elke’s ignorance seems to be the norm and not the exception. The vast majority of people that Koeppen describes deceive themselves and either imagine being in control or feel fated. They are imbalanced, disintegrated beings who either seek oblivion in pleasurable entertainment, excessive work, intellectual enterprises, and drugs
or surrender to despair. They ignore their possibilities and shirk from moral deliberation. They neglect the formation of their selves and suffer the consequences, which brings me to Kierkegaard’s perception of anxiety and despair.

Anxiety is entangled freedom

Climacus, the pseudonymous author of Kierkegaard’s *The Concept of Anxiety*, explains that human beings are essentially free but oftentimes misuse their freedom. They are either unaware of the possibility of freedom or ignore their potentiality and entangle their freedom by choosing not to be free, which causes various forms of anxiety. The first form of anxiety results from “spiritlessness,” which means that the individual fails to recognize that it is his or her task to deliberately shape his or her character, to become a self (Beabout 60). Based on his or her lack of spirit and unconcern for the future, he or she is either consciously or subliminally, as in the case of Elke Keetenheuve in *Das Treibhaus*, subject to anxiety (Beabout 60). The second form of anxiety originates from the feeling of being subject to fate (Beabout 61). The individual believes that his or her future depends on something that is not in his or her control. The third form of anxiety arises when the person’s recognizes that in his or her future lies the possibility of becoming guilty (Beabout 61).

When an individual recognizes the possibility of his or her freedom, anxiety may arise in the face of being responsible for one’s choices. Although the individual might desire self-determination and self-actualization, he or she might at the same time be terrified by the uncertain outcome, as well as the infinite number of his or her options and
possible choices (Watts 159). Since every choice has future consequences, including one’s guilt, the person might get entangled in the contemplation of his or her abilities and potential choices. However, by hoping to avoid guilt and to discover the absolutely right and good course of future actions, he or she postpones making decisions. It is further likely that the individual simply decides not to choose and represses his or her anxiety by engaging in various distracting activities (Watts 160-61). However, no matter if the person is conscious of it or not, choosing not to choose is *eo ipso* a choice, and the individual is responsible for the negative ramifications of his or her decision not to choose. His or her freedom is entangled by choice and not by necessity.

Despair is a sickness of the self

Another sign for the misuse of freedom is despair. According to Kierkegaard, despair is caused by an improper relation in the self. It is an indicator that one does not live up to the task of true selfhood and should serve as a vital incentive to correct the “self-deception” or “self-corruption” of one’s own making (Watts 176). As Anti-Climacus, the pseudonymous author of Kierkegaard’s *The Sickness Unto Death*, points out, the unwillingness of being a self manifests itself in various forms and degrees of despair. For example, people who run with the crowd are often unaware that going along with the masses undermines their self-hood and that their despair stems from shirking away from being a self (Watts 179). Since they have no sense of self, their despair is “the despair of unconsciousness” (Watts 182). They rather blame their despair on worldly misfortunes than on their negligence of true self-hood (Watts 179). They usually repress
this undesirable feeling by keeping themselves busy or embracing the pleasure principle. Other people despair over the fact that they are not honest with themselves and avoid being a self, which defines the despair of consciousness. These people are aware of not being a self and know of their potential freedom (Watts 179). Nonetheless, they do not believe that they are able to become a self and despair over the fact that they are unable to cast off their unwanted fake self (Watts 179). Some of these people are affected by “the despair of introversion” (Watts 180). They feel paralyzed and incompetent, contemplate their inability to be a self rather than acting upon their insight, and are subject to suicidal impulses (Watts 180). Individuals who are fully aware of being a free self, accept responsibility for their choices, and are determined to be a self on their own suffer from the despair of defiance. They misuse their freedom to satisfy purely worldly ambitions, deny the existence of God, are affronted by their despair, and curse life when things go wrong (Watts 184). However, Kierkegaard disclaims the misuse of freedom for purely worldly purposes and regards the deliberate rejection of God a grave mistake. When a person chooses not to be in right relation to him- or herself and to others, he or she is only “guilty and immoral” (Beabout 145). This guilt manifests itself in a person’s “feeling of shame” (Beabout 142). However, when a person is familiar with Christianity and, thus, has a conception of God and atonement, Anti-Climacus states that to despair is a sin (Beabout 112). Since chapter four of my study centers on Christian faith and the Church, I will refrain from discussing Kierkegaard’s religious views any further and rather move on to Koeppen’s protagonists and their various forms of self-corruption and misuse of freedom.
Philipp, the protagonist of *Tauben im Gras*, is portrayed as a highly reflective but indecisive intellectual whose life lacks cohesion and genuine force. He is neither a Christian nor actively participates in society. He has, as his wife bitterly remarks, “sein Sach auf nichts gestellt,” which is, according to Kierkegaard, typical for aesthetes. (*GW* 2: 37). It can be deduced from Philipp’s anxiety, despair, and nihilism that he misuses his freedom, neglects the formation of his self, and contents himself with the role of a detached observer. Hence, it is important to find out how he entangles his freedom and what keeps him from living up to his potential.

As already explained in chapter one, Philipp’s spouse, Emilia, lost her riches due to the war. She struggles immensely with the loss of her financial security and the harsh postwar reality (*GW* 2: 34). To make a living, the young woman reluctantly sells her family’s inherited silverware, china, and jewelry: “Emilia mußte ihren Schmuck verkaufen, sie weinte, wenn sie ihn zum Juwelier trug, und von dem Erlös der Kostbarkeiten und der Tränen lebte auch Philipp” (*GW* 2: 206). One of Philipp’s acquaintances gets to the bottom of the problem and chides him: “Sie dürfen sich nicht treiben lassen . . . wie sieht das aus! Ein Mann mit Ihrem Talent! . . . Sie müssen sich aufraffen, Philipp” (*GW* 2: 55). The protagonist knows that that he is partially responsible for his spouse’s distress: “Emilia . . . ich liebe dich aber du trennst dich besser von mir, du wirst auch allein untergehen, . . . du bist nur noch ein kleines zartes tobenes versoffenes Gespenst der Verzweiflung, meine Schuld? Na, meine Schuld, jedermanns Schuld . . .” (*GW* 2: 147). Philipp is not responsible for the devaluation of his
wife’s capital. Yet, the penniless and unemployed protagonist only cares about himself and does next to nothing to improve his and his spouse’s financial situation. He knows that his idleness contributes to Emilia’s distress, but he chooses to ignore his conscience, which is a clear misuse of his freedom.

The narrator suggests that Emilia, or rather her capital and social circle, curtails Philipp’s freedom and his lack of success in life:

Es gehörte zu den Kalamitäten seiner Existenz, daß er allein, ohne Emilia, viel einfacher leben und sich erhalten konnte, aber da er Emilia liebte und mit ihr lebte, . . . beraubte er sie ihres Gutes und war, wie ein Vogel an der Rute, der Luxusboheme des Kommerzienratserbes verleimt und konnte seine natürlichen Schwingen zu den kleinen Flügen, die ihm bestimmt waren und die ihm sein Futter gegeben hätten, nicht mehr rühren (GW 2: 206).

It seems that Philipp shares the narrator’s assessment of his personal situation. He sighs: “Ich werde nie wieder frei sein” (GW 2: 206). Like most aesthetes, he rather blames outer circumstances for his un-free state than his own lack of will power. Thus, Philipp’s fear—“ich habe mein Leben lang die Freiheit gesucht, aber ich habe mich verlaufen”(GW 2: 206)—is justified.

As the narrator affirms, Philipp was “ursprünglich auf einen Posten berufen, einen ehrenvollen Posten vielleicht, weil er alles beobachten sollte . . .” (GW 2: 23). He is the “Verfasser eines im Dritten Reich verbotenen und nach dem Dritten Reich vergessenen Buches” (GW 2: 55). He had hoped to gain fame, but his literary debut “war im Lautsprecherbrüllen und im Waffenlärm untergegangen, war von den Schreien der Mörder und Gemordeten übertönt worden, und Philipp war wie gelähmt, und seine
Stimme war wie erstickt . . .” (GW 2: 101). As the narrator points out, Philipp could easily become a well-respected author (GW 2: 100). Yet, he lacks willpower. He could write about the horrors of the recent past or about his present worries: “[E]r sah schon mit Grauen, wie der verfluchte Schauplatz . . . für ein neues blutiges Drama hergerichtet wurde” (GW 2: 101). But, Philipp does not act upon his concern, and neither did he in the past.

As he admits, “mir schlug die Stunde nicht, ich drückte mich durch die Diktatur, ich haßte aber leise, ich haßte aber in meiner Kammer, ich flüsterte aber mit Gleichgesinnten” (GW 2: 147). One of his like-minded friends was the journalist and communist Egon Erwin Kisch, who vehemently opposed the Hitler regime (GW 2: 147). Yet, in contrast to Kisch, Philipp did not have the courage to fight for what he perceived as right and good. To deflect his mind from his past and present moral shortcomings, he takes after the war an ironic stance towards people who sacrificed their life for what they perceived as right and good: “Spartakus Jesus Thomas Münzer Max Hölz, was wollten sie? Gut sein, was geschah? Man tötete sie . . . (GW 2: 147).

The awareness of his past moral negligence ought to be an incentive for Philipp to give at least an account of his present concerns. The protagonist feels a professional calling, but he stays idle:

Immer wollte Philipp etwas tun. Er dachte immer an die eine Arbeit, die er beginnen und ihn vollkommen erschöpfen würde. Er bereitete sich in Gedanken auf diese große Arbeit vor, die ihn anzog und erschreckte. Er . . . fühlte sich zu dieser Arbeit aufgerufen; aber er tat nie oder nur sehr selten wirklich etwas; er versuchte es nicht einmal. (GW 2: 140-41).
Unfortunately, like many postwar German intellectuals, Philipp lost faith in himself. Hence, he rather lets life run its course than seizing his freedom by forming his self and giving his life direction. As the narrator points out, “Philipp war nicht wetterwendischer als andere,” but “selbst er hätte mit jedem Schritt und mehr als tausendmal am Tag seine Meinung zu den Verhältnissen ändern können” (GW 2: 164). As the quote clearly reveals, the protagonist is not an integrated self but rather an imbalanced diversity of moods and thoughts. He knows that he “hätte Schriftsteller sein können.” (GW 2: 148). Yet, he is convinced of his incapability, “keine Hoffnung, für mich nicht mehr” (GW 2: 148). As a result, he belongs to the German postwar authors who sit “auf den Trümmern Karthagos und weinen” and cannot bring pen to paper (GW 2: 52). Thus, the narrator’s snide remark that Philipp is only someone who calls himself an author, “weil er in den Einwohnerakten als Schriftsteller geführt wurde” is justified (GW 2: 101).

Concerned about his independence, Philipp avoids taking sides. He excuses his suspension of judgment as follows: “›Überschaue ich es denn‹, dachte er, ›kenne ich die Rechnung der Politik? Die Geheimnisse der Diplomatie, . . . kann ich die Wissenschaft noch verstehen? Kenne ich die letzte Formel des Weltbildes, kann ich sie lesen? . . .‹” (GW 2: 164). It seems that Philipp wants to have all the answers before he engages himself, which is understandable after the mind-twisting propaganda tactics of the Third Reich. However, the protagonist should know that it is impossible to fully grasp all aspects and future implications of politics and science. Philipp’s tolerance—“ich bin für das Anhören jeder Meinung” (GW 2: 164)—is certainly admirable. But, his suspension of judgement is also a sign of his refusal to commit himself to anything. Behind his non-committal attitude stands his wish to be for himself: “[I]ch will für mich bleiben” (GW 2:
Yet, this unwillingness to actively participate in society is typical for mere beings, according to Kierkegaard.

In the attempt “unbefangen zu bleiben,” which seems to be Philipp’s understanding of freedom, he positions himself as a detached outsider and critical observer of society (GW 2: 164). He adopts an ironic attitude towards the hustle and bustle of society. He rejects people’s hedonism and ask Emilia silently: “[I]st deine Jugend so verdorrt, daß sie dieses Gusses bedarf, dieses Gusses aus Rausch, Alkohol und Synkopen, braucht dein Gefühl die Luft der Ungefühle, dein Haar den Wind schläfst-du-mit-mir-heut-nacht . . . (GW 2: 89-90). He makes fun of the conservatism of young postwar German intellectuals (GW 2: 89). He laments the puritanism of the working class (GW 2: 168). He laughs at people’s gullibility and “die Dummheit der politischen Propaganda,” although he knows that the maneuvers of politicians can cost him his life. (GW 2: 164). However, Philipp neglects his ability to set things straight. He neither attempts to correct what he perceives as wrong or immoral in the external world nor sincerely confronts his own lack of will power and moral substance.

For instance, the protagonist pokes fun at his psychiatrist’s bourgeois way of thinking: “Behude sucht auf dem Grund unseres Seins einen normalen Angestellten zu finden” (GW 2: 141). The thought of getting an ordinary job as a journalist, reporter, or screenplay writer enters his mind. But this idea seems to collide with Philipp’s non-conformism and dream of becoming an acclaimed writer. For the moment, he contents himself with being a bohemian and regards other people’s conventional endeavors as farcical: “Mir fehlt der Sinn für die Wirklichkeit, ich bin eben kein ernster Mann, . . . ich kann das, was alle treiben, einfach nicht ernst nehmen . . .” (GW 2: 58). Yet, the joke is
on him. He knows that other young postwar intellectuals seek self-fulfillment, make full
use of their talents, and work as “Gebrauchsgraphiker,” write “Reklametexte,” or earn
money “beim Film und Rundfunk” (GW 2: 89). Nonetheless, the protagonist chooses to
stay idle and, thus, neglects his potential.

As a result, Philipp’s self does not come into being and he feels like “eine der
leeren Packungen, die der Besen zum Kehrricht gefegt hatte, nutzlos, seiner Bestimmung
beraubt” (GW 2: 28). Yet, at the same time he asks himself: “Welcher Bestimmung? War
er zu etwas bestimmt gewesen, hatte er sich dieser Bestimmung entzogen, und konnte
man sich überhaupt einer Bestimmung entziehen?” (GW 2: 28). As the quote reveals,
Philipp senses the void of his spirit, which leads to a crucial questions. Does the
protagonist fail to notice that his destination is to be a free and self-determining
individual?

As the reader learns from Emilia’s stream of consciousness, Philipp’s book
collection contains Heidegger’s Sein und Zeit and his Holzwege, possibly Christian
literature, Hindu scriptures, such as the Upanishads, Schrödinger’s What is life?, Sartre’s
Nausea, and Kierkegaard’s Either/Or:

... Philipp auf den Holzwegen, ratlos im Gestrüpp in den Fußangeln Heideggers
... die Seele, ja, die Seele, Deus factus sum, die Upanischaden, Ordnung aus
Ordnung, Ordnung aus Unordnung, die Seelenwanderung, ... das Geworfensein,
Kierkegaard Angst tagebuchsreibender Verführer nicht zu Cordelia ins Bett,
Sartre der Ekel. ... das Selbst, die Existenz und die Philosophie der Existenz. ...
(GW 2: 35).
As the quote demonstrates, the protagonist is familiar with Heidegger’s, Sartre’s, and Kierkegaard’s philosophy and other existential texts. Hence, he knows, at least on an intellectual level, that his life is not predetermined, that he is essentially free, and that his ultimate task is becoming an authentic self through his choices and actions. Therefore, it must be something else that crushes his willpower and prevents his self from coming into being.

As can be deduced from Emilia’s aforementioned stream of consciousness, Philipp turns to existential literature in search for answers. Yet, the German phrase “auf den Holzwegen” indicates that Philipp not only lost orientation in life but also moves in the wrong direction. As the narrator indicates, books are not only “Brunnen der Hoffnung,” but also a “täuschender Quell für die Dürstenden” (GW 2: 33). Indeed, what the protagonist seeks cannot be found in books, since freedom needs to be lived. Once more, the protagonist’s fear—“ich habe mein Leben lang die Freiheit gesucht, aber ich habe mich verlaufen” (GW 2: 206)—is justified.

Considering the instrumentality of Koeppen’s animal-metaphors, it is informative that Philipp is defined, like Edwin, his American counterpart, as a tasty fish. Certainly in reference to Edwin’s status as an accomplished author, Messalina, the film actor’s wife, assesses Edwin as the bigger fish (GW 2: 169). But, she concedes that Philipp is the tastier one (GW 2: 169). That Philipp belongs to the class of cold-blooded animals indicates that he is an imbalanced person who lacks passion, as well as compassion for others. The former manifests itself in his passivity and the latter is evident from his

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78 The thought fragment “tagebuchschreibender Verführer nicht zu Cordelia ins Bett” refers to “The Seducer’s Diary,” a section of Kierkegaard’s Either/Or. Part one of Either/Or depicts aesthetic ways of life, while part two of Either/Or compares the aesthetic and the ethical ways of life and briefly touches the religious sphere (Allen 57).
disregard for his wife’s affliction. He tends to suppress vital feelings and emotions, which smothers his sensibility and conscience: “Litt er wenn er an die Toten dachte, an die toten Stätten, die verscharrten Gefährten? Nein die Empfindung versteifte sich . . . , die Vorstellung war irgendwie pompös, traurig und abscheulich, . . . aber vor allem war sie langweilig . . . ” (GW 2: 22). Philipp gives heed to his mind, which can be inferred from his intellectual enterprises, and yearns to be free. Yet, the protagonist does not substantiate his freedom. Rather than shaping his character and seizing his life, he loses himself in fears and worries and gives up hope: “Philipp hatte sich der Verzweiflung hingeben, einer Sünde. Das Schicksal hatte ihn in die Enge getrieben” (GW 2: 17). But, it is not fate that cornered the protagonist and gives rise to his anxiety and despair.

Germany’s defeat, the country’s occupation by the allies, the dawn of the Cold War, the menace of the newly invented atom bomb, and other outer postwar factors are distressing and certainly aggravate Philipp’s existential crisis. Yet, the true cause of his anxiety and despair is his misuse of his freedom and his very own sabotage of his self-development.

Since Philipp refuses continuously to give his life meaning, either by ethics or by faith, and simply contents himself with the role of a detached outsider and critic of society, his irony becomes destructive and turns into a debilitating nihilism. Philipp’s belief in nothing and no one has dire consequences. On the one hand, as the narrator reveals, nihilism distorts the protagonist’s perception. He cannot see clearly and views humanity as “schwankendes Menschenmal” in an ungovernable “Zeitsee” from which arises “ein gefrorenes, nichtssagendes, dem Gelächter schon überantwortetes Bild” (GW 2: 23). On the other hand, his nihilism has a paralyzing and demoralizing effect, which is evident from Philipp’s indecisiveness, passivity, and despair.
Moreover, the protagonist is strongly marked by worries, doubts, and anxiety (GW 2: 109). Anxiety takes a hold of him, because he feels fated and, thus, ignores his ethical potentiality: “Er hatte den Leuten . . . nichts zu sagen. Die Leute waren verurteilt. Er war verurteilt. . . Die Zeit hatte diesen Ort verurteilt” (GW 2: 56). The following passage casts Philipp’s fatalism and literary paralysis into a brighter light. The protagonist realizes that he could report that it is beneath him to write a “Film nach dem Geschmack der Leute” and that he lacks the courage “den Geschmack der Leute zu ändern” (GW 2: 57-58). As the quote reveals, Philipp believes in neither his own moral potential nor other people’s ability to change. To write about his lack of faith in himself and others is an option. Yet, he discards this possibility and, once again, misuses his freedom by choosing not to choose.

In the mix-up scene in which people confuse Philipp with Edwin, the protagonist becomes acquainted with Kay, an American teacher who visits Germany. The situation is embarrassing, since “ein Philipp geachtet wurde, den es gar nicht gab, den es aber leicht hätte geben können, . . . ein bedeutender Schriftsteller, dessen Werk selbst in Massachusetts gelesen wurde” (GW 2: 100). The protagonist wishes to leave the “aufsehenerregende, blitzbeleuchtete, für . . . ihn in mancher Weise beschämende Szene” as soon as possible (GW 2: 96). Yet, he is fascinated by Kay’s youth and light-heartedness (GW 2: 97). He is enticed by “ihrer frischen, aufrechten und unbefangenen Achtung vor Werten, die auch Philipp achtete, Qualitäten, die er besessen und verloren hatte” (GW 2: 100). As the quote demonstrates, the protagonist respects Kay’s uprightness and values. He believes that he has lost these qualities, which is only partially true. His awareness of values and their importance demonstrates Philipp’s ethical
potential. Yet, once again, he misuses his freedom by choosing not to act upon his ideals, which sabotages his self-development. Of special importance is here that the protagonist feels ashamed in the presence of Kay (GW 2: 101). Since the young American represents for him freedom, as well as “warmes, frisches Leben,” he feels guilty about his lack of spirit and un-freedom, which manifest itself in his shame (GW 2: 206).

However, in regard to the protagonist’s ethical potential, the novel ends on a positive note. Philipp and Kay meet once more. They both attend Edwin’s re-education speech and it seems that Philipp is going to seduce the young American woman after the lecture. Yet, it is not Kay that tempts him: “Immer wieder empfand Philipp Kays freiere Existenz. Nicht das Mädchen, die Freiheit verführte ihn” (GW 2: 206). He thinks that he will never be free again, but this is not the case. It might be true that he searched his whole life for freedom and that he lost the right path. Yet, when the protagonist checks into a shabby hotel to seduce Kay, he recognizes the immorality of his impending action. He senses that his heart grows cold, but this time he listens to his inner voice. He reflects on his desire and holds himself back: “Er dachte »ich will nicht böse werden: kein Herz aus Stein«” (GW 2: 218). Since he wills to be good and deliberately acts upon his moral choice, his self comes into being and he finally substantiates, at least for a moment, his freedom. If he will persevere as an ethical self, and if his freedom will last, is not revealed.
**Das Treibhaus: Keethenheuve’s self-corruption and misuse of freedom**

Considering the instrumentality of Koeppen’s animal-metaphors, it surprises that Keetenheuve, the protagonist of *Das Treibhaus* who pursues highly moral ideals, describes himself as a domesticated animal and civilized goat (*GW* 2: 324). In the same passage, he rates himself as a sick worm and blind mole (*GW* 2: 325). Then again, Keetenheuve calls himself a frightened and desperate nocturnal bird (*GW* 2: 353). At last, he refers to himself as an ogre (*GW* 2: 385). At first, this blatantly negative self-assessment is puzzling. The politician knows what it takes to be a self, and he is the one who calls the pitfalls of various aesthetic modes of existence to the reader’s attention. Yet, one has to keep in mind that the novel might be one lengthy interior monologue, and that Keetenheuve’s thoughts and the narrator’s comments are one and the same. Since, the protagonist’s perception is clearly impaired by guilt and despair, his discrediting self-evaluation might be misleading. Thus the question arises: is the despairing protagonist indeed a superficial hedonist who is unwilling to be a self or is he a spiritually exhausted ethical self? As it turns out, he is a borderline case, an aesthete who desperately wills to be a self but on his own terms.

Keetenheuve introduces himself as a “Gewissensmensch,” a “Bazillus der Unruhe,” and a nuisance (*GW* 2: 223). His wife had just passed away and he struggles with his loss and giving life meaning. He is certainly anxious and concerned but lacks resolution. Keetenheuve contemplates his possibilities but merely imagines es würde nun alles gutwerden, er würde alles besser anpacken, er würde zupacken, er würde sich durchsetzen, er würde zur Tat gelangen, sein Leben
As the quote reveals, he recognizes that he failed in the past to act upon what he perceived as right and good and regrets his passiveness. The protagonist alludes in this passage to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. The expression “*von des Gedankens Blässe angekränkelt*” is part of Hamlet’s world-famous soliloquy, in which he deliberates on suicide as a possibility to escape from life’s tribulations. In other words, Keetenheuve complacently compares himself with Shakespeare’s Prince of Denmark who is, on the one hand, a highly reflective intellectual and skeptic and, on the other hand, an irresolute dreamer. Hamlet, as well as Keetenheuve, imagines being the victim of external circumstances that are out of his control and considers ending his burdensome and seemingly doomed existence. Nonetheless, the grief-stricken Hamlet holds on to his conscience and endures life’s burden. In contrast, Keetenheuve is spiritually exhausted and empty. He feels incapable of enduring his despair any longer and commits suicide.

The novel describes his inner state, his memory of past experiences, and his assessment of outer circumstances that lead to his death.

Keetenheuve lacks substance and feels sorry for himself. The reader learns that the protagonist spent eleven years in exile to escape the Hitler regime. At first, one might assumes that he had acted upon his conscience, which would indicate that Keetenheuve has been in the past an ethical self, but this is not the case. As the reader learns from Elke, her husband’s life has been “bewegt und bunt” and full of “unverständlichen Sprüngen” and adventures (*GW 2: 232*). From this follows that Keetenheuve’s past life lacked stability, continuity, and genuine force. The protagonist recalls that he felt
somewhat disoriented and uprooted after the war and that “Elke war sein verzweifelter Versuch gewesen, hier wieder Wurzeln zu schlagen” (GW 2: 273). In retrospect, Keetenheuve blames himself for his irresponsible infatuation with the sensual teenager. That he initially stilled his sexual appetite is neither good nor bad. However, if he really disregarded Elke’s needs, as he claims after her death, he would have lived in misrelation to another person, which is, according to Kierkegaard, typical for mere beings (GW 2: 231).

The reader learns further that Keetenheuve sought after the war self-fulfillment and committed himself to the reconstruction of West-Germany and the stabilization of its newly reinstated democracy:

Das Kriegsende hatte ihn mit Hoffnung erfüllte, die noch eine Weile anhielten, und er glaubte, sich nun einer Sache hingeben zu müssen, nachdem er solange abseits gestanden hatte. Er wollte Jugendträume verwirklichen . . . (GW 2: 232).

As the quote reveals, he hoped to be publicly acknowledged. His desire to follow his dreams, to make-up for “verlorene Jahre,” and to shine in politics clearly indicates that Keetenheuve has been in the past a mere being whose driving forces were his inclinations and self-interests (GW 2: 233).

Based on his zealous effort and work for the country’s greater good, he is elected into the Lower House of German Parliament. Yet, politics ensnares Keetenheuve more and more. Keetenheuve remembers that he was “damals besessen von den Gedanken, zu helfen, aufzubauen, Wunden zu heilen, Brot zu schaffen,” and that he married Elke to rescue their strained friendship (GW 2: 230). As he recalls, their relationship has been mainly physical: “Sie paßten für die Liebe zusammen, doch nicht für das Leben. Er
konnte begehren, aber nicht erziehen. Er hielt nicht viel von Erziehung, aber er sah, wie
Elke unglücklich wurde vor einem Übermaß an Freiheit” (GW 2: 230). Keetenheuve’s
endeavor to alleviate the hardship of postwar society is certainly admirable. Yet, instead
of assisting his spouse in finding her bearings, he prefers the pursuit of the public good. If
he would have been an ethical self, he would have felt responsible to meet both
obligations, i.e., to live in right relation to himself and others.

In addition, politics turned out to be harder than Keetenheuve had imagined. First,
the political postwar situation is complicated and

alles scheiterte wieder einmal an Kleinigkeiten, an dem zähen Schlick des

Untergrunds, der den Strom des frischen Wassers hemmte und alles im alten

stecken ließ, in einer überlieferten Lebensform, von der jeder wußte, daß sie eine

Lüge war (GW 2: 232-33).

Second the political situation is morally challenging:

An jeder Entscheidung hingen tausendfache Für und Wider, Lianen gleich, Lianen
der Urwalda, ein Dschungel war die praktische Politik, Raubtiere begegneten

einem, man konnte mutig sein, man konnte die Taube gegen den Löwen

verteidigen, aber hinterrücks biß einen die Schlange (GW 2: 233).

Hence, he begins to questions the success of his political endeavors (GW 2: 233). Yet, a
genuine ethical being does not measure his or her success on external accomplishments.

Keetenheuve is aware that freedom and human rights are more than hypothetical
possibilities, and that people are afraid of true freedom (GW 2: 233). However, he
mainly focuses on the external world and half-heartedly reflects on his inner state and the
possibility of his individual freedom. Rather than shaping his character, the politician
pursues commonly accepted universal values, such as peace, liberty, equality, and fraternity but does not know how to actualize these ideals, which explains why he calls himself a blind mole. Much to his surprise, he encounters resistance and gets frustrated: “Keetenheuve sah sich bald wieder in die Opposition gedrängt, aber die ewige Opposition machte ihm keinen Spaß mehr . . .” (GW 2: 233). Keetenheuve knows that he should confront the government and vigorously fight for his ideals, but his initial resolution dwindles (GW 2: 322). He recognizes that he wavers and gets angry with himself:

Fatal war, daß er faul war . . ., weil er ungläubig, zweifelnd, verzweifelt, skeptisch war, und sein eifriges und aufrichtiges Vertreten der Menschenrechte war nur noch ein letzter eigensinnig spielerischer Rest von Oppositionslust und Staatswiderstand (GW 2: 241).

However, politics is not a playground for wavering dilettantes. Although Keetenheuve recognizes that “das Spiel um Menschen” is not a pastime but a serious, labor-intensive task, he flees into the world of books, poetry, and fine dining (GW 2: 311).

Nonetheless, he is truly upset when Elke dies. The protagonist recognizes in retrospect that he had let his wife down: “Ihm war ein Mensch überantwortet und er ließ ihn fallen” (GW 2: 236). After his wife’s death, Keetenheuve adopts an ironic stance towards the external world and himself, which clearly defines him as a developed aesthete on the verge of becoming a self. He begins ridiculing not only the vanity, shortcomings, and wrongdoings of others but also his own flaws. He feels like a “Menschenrechtsromantiker,” and ponders if he is “ein Museumsstück” (GW 2: 240).
In addition, he feels guilty and responsible for Elke’s premature death and perceives the shallowness of his past and present way of life:

Vor jeder Lebensaufgabe versagte er. . . Er hatte in der Politik versagt. Er hatte im Beruf versagt. Er bewältigte das Dasein nicht, . . . es war wie ein Fluch, . . . er hatte auch in der Ehe versagt, . . . alles war nur ein Betasten der Oberflächen (GW 2: 227).

Anxiety haunts him in his sleep, which explains why he calls himself a frightened nocturnal bird (GW 2: 237). In other words, his spiritlessness begins to take a toll on him and he begins to questions his existence: “Was will ich hier, was tue ich hier . . . ?” (GW 2: 246). In search for answers, he turns to Kierkegaard but decries the philosopher’s existential ethics as “Kindermädchenrost für Intellektuelle” (GW 2: 353). From this follows that he is fully aware of what is at stake.

The protagonist reflects upon his present state of being and recognizes that his life is a mere concept, “ein Entwurf zu einem wirklichen Leben” (GW 2: 353). He constantly contemplates alternative ways of life but feels incompetent and “schlachtreif” (GW 2: 274). Even worse, Keetenheuve feels fated:

As the quote reveals, Keetenheuve rejects not only the aesthetic but also the ethical and religious way of life, which shows the extreme degree of his self-corruption. He knows that his despair is a sign of his spirit’s sickness and, thus, calls himself a desperate nocturnal bird and a sick worm. Further, he recognizes the meaninglessness of his thus far aesthetic mode of being but is unwilling to give his life new meaning and direction. He clearly entangles his freedom by choice.

Although Keetenheuve merely scraped the surface of the ethical sphere and pursued for selfish motives universal ethical ideals, he knows that this form of existence is strenuous. He recognizes that to be an ethical self requires passionate commitment and constant striving, but he feels spent and incapable of meeting these requirements: “Er hatte sich ausgegeben” (GW 2: 376). Nonetheless, he is subject to self-deception and the despair of introversion and defiance. He merely contemplates his passiveness, irresolution, and incompetence, and fails to control his feelings and emotions by means of moral deliberation. In fact, rather than being incapable of self-hood, he is willing to become neither an ethical nor a religious self.

Elke’s death, anxiety, and despair brought Keetenheuve to the contemplation of his existence and to the brink of faith, but he cowardly dismisses the possibility of becoming a religious self. Like Elke, he eventually senses the call of the transcendental, but pride and cowardice stand in his way. When he suffers a massive anxiety attack, he experiences that his mortal self is merely “eine enttäuschende schmutzige Hülle” (GW 2: 255). He senses

eine unsichtbare, selbst in der Geheimschrift der Mathematik nicht mehr zu bezeichnende Wegmarke, wo alles aufhörte, ein Weiter gab es nicht, und hier war
die Deutung, sieh!, sieh!, du wirst sehen, frage!, frage!, du wirst hören . . . (GW 2: 254-55).

At this moment, the protagonist could leap into faith and ask God for atonement and assistance: “[N]ach einem Halt wollte er tasten, obwohl er es auch wieder nicht wagte, die Hand nach einem Halt auszustrecken” (GW 2: 254). Something “das den Drang hatte zu wachsen, das aus Knochen und Haut dringen wollte,” i.e., his spirit, yearns to come to the fore, but he defies the Almighty and prefers to be a self on his own (GW 2: 254). Hence, “er senkte den Blick, feig, feig, feig, geschlossen blieb der Mund, arm, arm, arm, und er klammerte sich an, klammerte sich fest an sich selbst” (GW 2: 255). With this decision, his downfall takes its course (GW 2: 255).

When Keetenheuve meets Lena, a young mechanic from East-Germany who desperately searches for a job, “Keetenheuve der alte Oger” resurfaces (GW 2: 385-86). He lusts once again for “Menschenfleisch,” which explains why he calls himself a domesticated animal and civilized goat (GW 2: 385). Nonetheless, he recognizes that he would merely repeat his mistakes to seek diversion in sexual pleasure and to cling to another person in the hope of finding stability in his life. Since he is willing neither to be a mere being nor to be a self, he chooses the third option, i.e., not to be at all. He misuses his freedom and freely chooses death as his telos. For the first time in his life, he resolutely actualizes a self-chosen goal. Nonetheless, this desperate move is an absurd form of self-realization. In the moment of death he actualizes his self and destroys it at the same time.
As already documented in the previous chapters, Siegfried is a highly reflective and self-critical individual. He is concerned about his freedom and fights against external forces that pose a threat to his independence. In contrast to Philipp, the passive postwar German writer, the young composer renders with his dissonant twelve-tone symphony a realistic account of his time and individual concerns. In short, he actively seeks self-actualization and makes full use of his talents. Even so, as I will show, he is neither an ethical nor a religious self but a highly developed aesthete who desperately wants, like Keetenheuve, the protagonist in *Das Treibhaus*, to be a self but on his own terms.

Siegfried is introduced in the second paragraph of the novel. He attends a rehearsal of his symphony. He appreciates the conductor’s precision, but the performance does not meet his expectations: “Falsch klang die Musik, . . . so war die Furcht vor dem Dasein nicht, sie war nicht so maßvoll, sie war bei weitem nicht so wohltemperiert . . .” ([GW 2: 393-94](#)). As his inner thoughts make known, Siegfried is tormented by anxiety and uses his music as an outlet for his internal crisis. The conductor’s wife, Ilse Kürenberg, sheds more light on the composer’s inner state. She notices with disdain that his music expresses “Zerfahrenes und Hoffnungsloses, . . . eine in ihrer Nackheit schamlose Äußerung der reinen nichtswürdigen Verzweiflung” ([GW 2: 403](#)). As the two abovementioned quotes point out, the protagonist is subject to anxiety and despair, which indicates that he misuses his freedom and sabotages his self-development, just like his two fictional predecessors, Philipp and Keetenheuve.
Adolf, who attends in Rome a seminary and is present for the premiere of his cousin’s symphony, dislikes Siegfried’s music as well. The young priest discerns “Gegensätzliches, wohltuenden Schmerz, lustige Verzweiflung, mutige Angst, süße Bitternis, Flucht und Verurteilung der Flucht, traurige Scherze, kranke Liebe und eine mit üppigen Blumentöpfen bestellte Wüste” and interprets the symphony as a decorated “Sandfeld der Ironie” (GW 2: 538). Adolf’s insight is correct. As I will show shortly, the protagonist is indeed an ironist, i.e., a highly developed aesthete who positions himself as a detached outsider and critical observer at the margin of society to evade not only instrumentalization by social forces but also any social engagement. Adolf recognizes further in the symphony Siegfried’s longing for friendliness, happiness and “Schöpfungslob” (GW 2: 538). Yet, the music’s narcissistic flirtation with cynicism, faithlessness, and despair repulses Adolf (GW 2: 538). His assessment casts Siegfried’s problems into bright light. The protagonist is a diversity of conflicting moods and desolate thoughts, which signals that his life lacks cohesion and genuine force.

To do Siegfried justice, it is important to recall the outer circumstances that triggered his existential crisis and culminated in its artistic expression. As already expounded upon in the introduction and previous chapters, the protagonist has been conditioned during his childhood by Nazi ideology. His father, Friedrich Wilhelm Pfaffrath, and his uncle, Gottlieb Judejahn, have been high-ranking Nazis. Thus, Siegfried attended with his younger brother, Dietrich, and his cousin, Adolf Judejahn, a training school for future Nazi leaders. Later on, he fought in the Wehrmacht and spent some time in a war prison camp. No wonder that he is full of resentment and that his music reflects his “Auflehnung gegen . . . das Kriegsgefangenencamp, den
Stacheldrahtzaun, . . . den Krieg, den er seinen Eltern zuschrieb, und das ganze vom Teufel besessene und geholte Vaterland (GW 2: 395).

In contrast to Dietrich, who turned into an opportunistic conformist with a avidity for power, and in contrast to Adolf, who put his faith in God, the disillusioned protagonist adopts after the war a cynical and nihilistic view: “Ich glaube zwar; aber ich glaube, daß alles sinnlos ist” (GW 2: 495). However, Siegfried admits to himself: “Ich rede gern schamlos drein, aber ich schäme mich. Ich gebe mich respektlos und sehne mich danach, achten zu können” (GW 2: 401). Considering the “moral bankruptcy” of the Third Reich, the protagonist’s shame and contempt is understandable (Brockmann 170). He feels like a victim of the older generation and blames his older family members for “ein Jahrhundert nationaler Dummheit, soldatischen Drills, deutschbürgerlicher Begrenzung, die leider größenzwahnsinnig und tobsüchtig wurde” (GW 2: 502). Further, he resents his older relatives,


In the attempt to liberate himself from the ballast of the Third Reich and to free himself from guilt, which is typical for the young generation of postwar Germans, he rigorously turns his back on his family and society. He believes himself to be free: “Ich hatte mich befreit. Ich fühlte mich frei. Ich glaubte mich befreit und ich wollte frei bleiben . . .”
(GW 2: 458). Nonetheless, the protagonist’s anxiety signals that he is not as free as he claims to be.

Since his political dream is “ein Bild eines wahrhaft freien, toleranten, humanen, friedlichen Landes,” he is concerned about Germany’s re-burgeoning nationalism and militarism (Quack 216). Likewise, he worries about his family’s sustained fascism and lack of remorse. Even so, he does not act upon his moral concerns. He rather resigns and contents himself with eternal flight, “einem Weg, von dem man wußte, daß er woher kam, aber nirgends wohin führte” (GW 2: 502). However, he recognizes no other way out of his mental, moral, and emotional impasse, “weil er über jeden Pfad die Nacht der Verzweiflung breitete und ihn ungangbar gemacht hatte” (GW 2: 403).

Siegfried’s despair indicates that he does not live up to the task of true selfhood. Rather than shaping his character and giving his life direction and meaning through ethical choices and actions, Siegfried adopts a nihilistic and cynical stance, which is the true cause of his despair. His nihilism and cynicism come most clearly to the fore in what I call the protagonist’s parable of the Western mind. In a conversation with Adolf, the protagonist compares humanity with a donkey that pulls a wagon. In the Middle Ages, the donkey believed he was pulling the wagon towards paradise. When the donkey noticed that he did not get any closer to heaven, he got tired. The “Heu der Religion lockte ihn nicht mehr” (GW 2: 545). To prevent the wagon from coming to a halt, “hat man den Hunger des Esels auf ein irdisches Paradies gelenkt, auf einen Sozialpark, in dem alle Esel gleiche Rechte haben werden, in dem die Peitsche abgeschafft, die Last geringer, die Versorgung besser wird” (GW 2: 545). Yet, the way to this worldly Garden of Eden is long, “das Ziel rückt nicht näher, und der Esel wird wieder bockig” (GW 2:
545). Fortunately, as Siegfried explains to Adolf, the donkey wears blinkers that impede its vision. Thus, the donkey fails to notice “daß es nie voran, sondern immer im Kreis geht, daß er keinen Wagen, sondern ein Karusell bewegt, und vielleicht sind wir eine Belustigung auf einem Festplatz der Götter . . .” (GW 2: 545). With the reference to the gods of the ancients, the protagonist’s narrative comes to full circle. Of special importance is here that Siegfried tells a parable, which is by definition a succinct story that conveys an either moral or religious message. Although his cynical parable of the Western mind expresses the protagonist’s contempt for the “Bewegung des Lebens,” it also provides evidence for Siegfried’s subconscious moral objection to humanity’s lack of progress (GW 2: 545). As already mentioned before, the protagonist is at times an imposter: “Ich rede gern schamlos drein, aber ich schäme mich. Ich gebe mich respektlos und sehne mich danach, achten zu können” (GW 2: 401).

Siegfried not only deliberately ignores humanity’s but also his own moral and spiritual potential, which sabotages his self-development. For example, as already expounded upon in chapter one, Siegfried recognizes the compassion of an old woman, who rescues stray cats from starvation (GW 2: 399). Yet, he himself looks the other way when he encounters poverty, although it grieves him (GW 2: 398). In other words, he knows the difference between ethically right and wrong behavior, but he use his freedom improperly by choosing not to act upon his conscience. In another scene, the protagonist would like to buy a bottle of wine for a poor man but desists from it. He is ashamed of his friendly inspiration and gets angry with himself (GW 2: 449). Considering Siegfried’s nihilistic stance, the protagonist is on the verge of contradicting himself. Acting upon his charitable impulse would bring about a moral act, which would invalidate his distrust in
his own and other people’s moral potential. It is more than likely that his anger originates from the recognition of his self-deception.


Even so, Adolf’s moral and spiritual imperatives disturb Siegfried in his self-imposed nihilism. Concerned about the older generation’s redemption, the young deacon wishes to bring his own and Siegfried’s parents to their senses. He seeks his cousin’s assistance, which the protagonist denies: “[I]ch sollte mit ihm, der sich fürchtete, die Sippe suchen, . . . die Sippe, dieses Gefängnis, . . . doch ich war ausgebrochen, . . . ich wollte nicht zurück!” (GW 2: 432). The quote discloses that Siegfried attributes too much power to external forces and not enough to himself. The defiant protagonist feels particularly offended by Adolf’s proposal to explain to their parents why they prefer a
different way of life: “Du bist wohl wahnsinnig! Ich will mein Leben ja nicht rechtfertigen! Wie käme ich denn dazu, mich vor den Eltern zu rechtfertigen? Ich denke gar nicht daran!” (GW 2: 516). Yet, the young priest counters that one has always to justify one’s life not only before God but also before others, even one’s parents. This notion casts the shortcoming of Siegfried’s egocentric and heedless way of life into bright light. He selfishly pursues his own well-being without concern for other people, and he deliberately ignores that his actions will be judged by others and possibly by a higher power.

Stirred by Adolf’s request, Siegfried ponders: “Wenn Adolf und ich das Leben nicht meistern, dann sollten wir uns gegen die verbunden, die skrupellos sind und nach dem Grad ihrer Beschränktheit herrschen wollen, gegen die echten Pfaffraths, die echten Judejahns, . . . vielleicht könnten wir Deutschland ändern?” (GW 2: 502). The thought of changing Germany for the better entices him, but convinced of the futility of such an attempt, he dismisses the idea and curses his cousin, most likely for penetrating his defense mechanisms and exposing his self-deception (GW 2: 503). He yells defiantly at Adolf: “Mich laß in Ruhe. Ich lebe, wie ich will. Ich brauche niemanden” (GW 2: 516). His cousin counters: “Gut, du willst für dich leben. Du meinst, deinen Weg gefunden zu haben. Das genügt dir. Aber warum bist du dann so unversöhnlich?” (GW 2: 516). Siegfried is irreconcilable because he holds his and Adolf’s parents accountable for the war and the suffering of millions of people (GW 2: 517). Yet, the former member of the Wehrmacht conveniently overlooks that he himself was part of the war machinery. Siegfried admits to his cousin that he fears the return of Germany’s nationalism and militarism and insists that now is his only chance to live how it pleases him (GW 2: 517).
In other words, the protagonist feels doomed, which explains his anxiety. Adolf dismisses the protagonist’s fatalism in a heartbeat. He suggests that Siegfried should rather attempt to prevent such an ill-fated development by changing people’s way of thinking (GW 2: 517). In the heat of the moment, the protagonist discards Adolf’s moral advice.

Nonetheless, Adolf’s plea has heightened Siegfried’s conscience, which in turn subverts his self-chosen position as a detached outsider. Thus, the protagonist asks himself, “war es nicht auch mein Gedanke, daß wir, die Söhne, die wir andere Lebensweisen wünschten, auch für sie kämpfen sollten; trotz allem Anschein der Aussichtlosigkeit?” (GW 2: 518). The better part of him wants to shake hands with Adolf, but he allows his egoism and cynicism to dominate his behavior, which is a clear misuse of his freedom (GW 2: 518). Thus, he mocks and viciously attacks his cousin:


The quote exposes Siegfried scornful distrust in people’s potential for good. Nonetheless, Siegfried realizes his maliciousness after this verbal attack and feels “häßlich wie Kaliban” (GW 2: 518). Even so, Shakespeare’s Caliban has no conscience and acts out of necessity. In contrast, the protagonist knows that his behavior is spiteful and asks himself why he torments and discourages Adolf: “Warum quälte ich ihn? Warum entmutigte ich
ihn? Weil ich selbst entmutigt bin, oder weil mein Entmutigtsein mir das Außenseiterdasein sicherte, die Panflöte im Sumpf? (GW 2: 518). As his inner monologue discloses, the protagonist questions his own disposition and conduct and turns his irony against himself. That he refers to himself as “Panflöte im Sumpf” indicates that he is on the verge of leaving the aesthetic sphere behind. He could leap now into faith or become an ethical self, provided that he stops using his despair as a means to position himself outside of society, which allows him to evade not only questionable social rules and conventions but also a serious social-political engagement.

Unfortunately, the protagonist still hopes “ohne zu rechnen auf die Summe zu kommen” (GW 2: 539). After the premiere of his symphony, he passes a railroad station. His inner thoughts reveal that he has not yet made up his mind whether to choose the religious or the ethical way of being:


It is my contention that the three different classes of rail wagons correspond to Kierkegaard’s triadic conception of life, i.e., the religious, ethical, and aesthetic spheres. The first-class wagon that represents the religious way of life is empty except for one person, while the third-class wagon that stands for the aesthetic sphere is overcrowded with heedless passengers of life. The second-class wagon that leads to Germany represents the ethical way of being, i.e., a life that is ruled by an active social
engagement. Siegfried contemplates the possibility of becoming a religious self but wonders if he would succeed. The possibility of becoming an ethical self, which would require his return to Germany and a confrontation of and commitment to society, does not entice him. Although he objects now to the crowded sphere of thoughtless superficiality, he defies God and society once more and boards, metaphorically speaking, the third-class wagon for mere beings.

Advised by the “Philosophen des Pessimismus,” which I interpret as the author’s ironic sideswipe at postwar existential nihilism, Siegfried receives an award from his sponsors for his twelve-tone symphony (GW 2: 529). The protagonist welcomes the money and decides to travel to Mogador, “eine alte maurische Festung” in Morocco, to compose a black symphony (GW 2: 573). Since the Moors lost their power over the centuries, the protagonist concludes that it is safe to reside in their stronghold (GW 2: 573). In short, Siegfried still contents himself with eternal flight and, thus, continues to neglect his ethical and spiritual potential.

Koeppen’s moral admonition

As can be deduced from the author’s portrayal of his main characters, Koeppen distances himself from the role of the artist as a detached outsider and critic and objects to the young generation’s egoism and lack of commitment. As Koeppen points out in Tauben im Gras, history is man-made and that means “Dabeisein, Werden, Wachsen” and “Handeln” (GW 2: 39). Yet, Germany’s young intellectuals, not unlike like Philipp, Keetenheuve, and Siegfried, neglect in Koeppen’s view not only their personal freedom

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and self-development. They also forsake their country’s future. As the author reveals, they perceive themselves as victims of outer circumstances and are concerned about Germany’s kindling nationalism and militarism. Even so, they feel powerless to change the course of events and turn their back to Society. Rather than using their ability to make a difference, these young intellectuals resign and hide their despair behind a mask of cynicism and nihilism. They adopt the stance of a detached outsider and content themselves with being noncommittal critical observers. However, Koeppen indicates that the backbone of Germany’s future should at least try to set things straight.

Following his own advice, the postwar German author positions himself not only as a critical observer of society but also as an active moral agent who espouses, like his two mentors, the correction of his contemporaries’ moral and spiritual deficiencies. By the very act of writing and publishing his trilogy, Koeppen demonstrates to Germany’s cultural and intellectual elite that non-conformism, i.e., a critical stance towards the collective and commonly accepted social rules and regulations, does not exclude an active engagement in society. To the contrary, he indicates in his postwar novels that ethical choices and actions are essential for one’s self-development and that social commitment is a means to overcome despair and nihilism. Yet, at the same time and not unlike Kierkegaard before him, Koeppen implies in *Das Treibhaus* that the pursuit of ethical ideals for the country’s greater good has its pitfalls and potentially leads to a person’s moral and spiritual bankruptcy. Thus, the postwar German author offers faith as another possible way to give life meaning.
Chapter Four: Church and Faith

This chapter investigates the themes of Church and faith as they manifest themselves in Koeppen’s *Tauben im Gras, Das Treibhaus,* and *Der Tod in Rom.* As already discussed in the previous chapters, the Third Reich’s moral bankruptcy, Germany’s total defeat, and the onset of the Cold War led to a surge of nihilism that threatened to engulf the nation. Brockmann writes: “Among major German intellectuals in the immediate postwar period, only Gottfried Benn celebrated his nihilism” (208). Some Germans accepted the “collapse of all established values as a fait accompli” and dealt with the problem by turning to existential philosophy (210). However, the majority of Germans believed in “humanity’s need for moral values” and perceived in “religious and moral tradition” an antidote to nihilism (210). As a result, “one of the primary intellectual phenomena of the immediate postwar era . . . was a Christian revival present both in literature and politics” (Brockmann 2). Among the writers who turned to faith were Alfred Döblin and Heinrich Böll. Both authors were proponents of Roman Catholicism.79

In line with Germany’s cultural elite, Koeppen was concerned about his era’s belief in nothing and no one and offered in his trilogy not only ethics but also faith as potential remedies for his contemporaries’ existential crisis. Yet, at the same time, postwar Germany’s revivification of Christianity caught Koeppen’s critical attention. He noticed, like Kierkegaard before him, that many of his contemporaries were only nominal Christians. He worried in particular that many postwar Germans simply turned after Hitler’s downfall to the Church in search of a new master. This concern comes clearly to

79 For an account on Döblin’s and Böll’s turn to Christianity see Brockmann.
the fore when Siegfried, the protagonist of Der Tod in Rom, silently questions his cousin’s faith:


Koeppen was also perturbed by the Christianization of postwar politics and the Church’s involvement in worldly affairs. As already explained in chapter two, Pascal’s keen perception and exposure of socio-political mechanism had sharpened Koeppen’s sense for power maneuvers of all sorts. Thus, he examined in his trilogy not only the spiritual state of postwar society and politics but also the role, function, and integrity of the Church, i.e., the Roman Catholic Church. Since Koeppen portrayed a society that no longer believes in or misconceives Christianity and presented the Roman Catholic Church as a powerful worldly institution whose integrity needs to be questioned, the trilogy’s themes of Church and faith are ambiguous. Nevertheless, as the following analysis will show, the author’s critique is directed at institutional Christianity and faux Christians but not at the Christian faith per se.

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80 The revival of Christianity had “led to the birth of Germany’s dominant postwar political party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and of its Bavarian sister party the Christian Social Union (CSU), which governed the Federal Republic of Germany for most of the postwar period” (Brockmann 2).
The Catholic Church in *Tauben im Gras*

The theme of the Church is not as prominent in Koeppen’s first postwar novel as the theme of faith. Nonetheless, the author accentuates in *Tauben im Gras* the Catholic Church’s inapproachability, lack of compassion, and neglect of spiritual duties. The narrator records: “Die Kirchen haben Portale aus dicken Bohlen, schwerem Holz, eisernen Beschlägen und kupfernen Bolzen. . . . Man konnte gerade zu Gott hineinschlüpfen” (*GW* 2: 15). The church’s physical inaccessibility corresponds to its aloofness in spiritual matters. The narrator mentions the church’s deadly cold (*GW* 2: 16). The church’s structure, its thick walls and formidable size, certainly accounts for the chilly temperature within the building. But its coldness, as Koeppen indicates, also conforms to the priest’s lack of compassion:

Die Gläubigen knieten. Sie sahen in dem hohen Raum wie verhärmte Mäuse aus.


Der Priester litt unter seiner Nüchternheit (*GW* 2:16).

As the quote reveals, the priest absentmindedly performs the Eucharist. This Christian sacrament, also called Holy Communion, is performed in commemoration of Christ’s Last Supper and His sacrifice on the Cross. It is considered a sacrifice offered to God for
the forgiveness of people’s sins. With the phrase “Macht, der Kirche und ihren Dienern verliehen” Koeppen alludes to the alleged absolution power of the Roman Catholic Church, which is a power that the author calls into question at various points in his trilogy.\textsuperscript{81} Neither Holy Communion nor the prayers of his careworn parish members move the priest:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

Of special importance here is that the prayers of the congregation are compared to desert sand, which stresses postwar Germans’ spiritual barrenness.

In the same scene, a fifty-year old man slips through the church portal. Hardship, work, worries, and two world wars have worn him out. As the narrator points out, “er war in ein endloses Gespräch verstrickt; er sprach zu sich: wer sonst hätte ihm zugehört?” (\textit{GW} 2: 16). Because the narrator poses this question in the house of God, his query bristles with irony. On the one hand, the narrator’s interrogation underscores the priest’s abovementioned lack of compassion and his perfunctory performance of spiritual duties. On the other hand, it accentuates the church-goers’ unconcern for another’s suffering, which indicates that they are nominal believers instead of genuine Christians who care for other people’s well-being. In any case, the author directs attention to God with the query, “who else would have listen to him?,” which suggests that the Almighty will listen to the pleas of the faithful.

\textsuperscript{81} Since Koeppen is a Protestant, his skepticism toward the Roman Catholic Church’s absolution powers is self-explanatory. According to the Protestant Church’s belief, only God can forgive sins.
Faith in *Tauben im Gras*

In particular, three peripheral characters are pivotal to the theme of faith in *Tauben im Gras*: Emmi, Hillegonda, and Washington Price. Emmi is Hillegonda’s nanny. Hillegonda is the daughter of Messalina and the film actor Alexander. Washington is a soldier of the American occupying forces. An analysis of these characters is fruitful. As I will show, Emmi is one of postwar Germany’s nominal Christians. She is a religious fanatic but her Christianity is wanting. Emmi and Hillegonda stand in sharp contrast to each other. Through narratorial comments and the little girl’s naïve perception of her nanny and spiritual matters, Koeppen stresses Emmi’s unchristian conduct and reveals the inadequacy of the woman’s religious views most clearly. In comparison to the nanny’s lack of mercy and compassion, Hillegonda and Washington Price display a sincere concern for other people’s well-being. Their kindness is a genuine Christian quality that many characters in *Tauben im Gras* do not possess.

Emmi’s misconceived Christianity

Emmi’s spirituality is austere and lacks, as the author implies, the quality of a true Christian. The narrator describes Hillegonda’s nanny as “eine[] derbe[] Person vom Lande, in deren breitem Gesicht, die einfache Frömmigkeit der Bauern böse erstarrt war” (*GW* 2: 15). Her religious singing is “klageweibisch” and a constant warning: “Der Gesang der Kinderfrau, hörst-du-das-Glöcklein-läuten, war eine immer-währende Mahnung und hiess: klage nicht, frage nicht, freue dich nicht, lache nicht, spiele nicht,”
tändele nicht, nütze die Zeit, denn wir sind dem Tod verfallen” (GW 2: 15). As the quote indicates, the nanny’s concept of Christianity is bleak, her worship is void of praise and joy, and, thus, she curtails the natural playfulness, happiness, and soulfulness of the child in her care. As a follower of Christ, Emmi should be familiar with Jesus’ concept of mercy, compassion, and love. Yet, rather than conforming to His Spirit and qualities, the nanny is rather unforgiving, callous, harsh, and insensitive. She believes in a strict regimen and is defined as a relentless guard: “Die Kinderfrau drückte Hillegondas kleine Hand. Es war kein freundlicher, beistehender Druck; es war der feste unerbittliche Griff des Wächters” (GW 2: 15).

Emmi hopes to lead Hillegonda to God and “sah es als die ihr von Gott gestellte Aufgabe an, das Schauspielerkind, das Sündenkind, das Kind, um das sich die Eltern nicht kümmerten, in der Furcht vor Gott zu erziehen” (GW 2: 115). The following quote brings the parents’ neglect to the fore: “In der Wohnung schrie ein Kind, Hillegonda, Alexanders kleines Mädchen... Angst, Verzweiflung, Verlassenheit lag in dem Kinderschrei. Alexander dachte ›ich müßte mich um sie kümmern, ich müßte Zeit haben, sie sieht blaß aus‹” (GW 2: 14). The father recognizes his daughter’s distress but does not act upon it and neither does Emmi. Instead of alleviating Hillegonda’s needs, as a genuine Christian would do, the nanny is rather insensitive and heartless. Thus, she aggravates the little girl’s fear and forlornness. Emmi is convinced that only rigor can wrench Hillegonda away from hell: “Aber man durfte Hillegonda nicht Liebe, man durfte ihr nur Strenge zeigen, um sie der Hölle zu entreißen, der sie durch ihre Geburt schon verfallen war (GW 2: 115). She speaks to Hillegonda of death “um ihr die Nichtigkeit des Lebens zu beweisen” and goes to church on a daily basis with the little girl “um ihren
Sinn auf die Ewigkeit zu lenken” (GW 2: 115). But, as the narrator points out, Hillegonda “schauderte vor dem Tod” (GW 2: 115). She also “fürchtete sich vor der Stille, sie fürchtete sich vor der Kälte, vor der Größe und Erhabenheit des Kirchenschiffs, sie fürchtete sich vor Emmi und vor Gott” (GW 2: 115-16). The nanny recognizes Hillegonda’s distress but does not act upon it. She does not feel responsible for the child’s well-being and believes that God will take care of the little girl’s needs: “Gott würde Hillegonda helfen. Gott würde ihr beistehen. Er würde sich der Kleinen und Hilflosen, der unschuldig schuldig mit Sünde Beladenen annehmen” (GW 2:115). Thus, Emmi neglects one of the most important Christian laws, i.e., “love your neighbor” (GW 2: 115).

Koeppen indicates further that the nanny is guilty of pride, which emphasizes her unchristian conduct.\(^8^2\) Emmi’s behavior oscillates between lowliness and pretentiousness. On the one hand, she humbly kneels in devotion of God in the dust. On the other hand, she is self-righteous and feels, based on her religious beliefs, a smug superiority toward other people. For example, Emmi disrespects the little girl in her care and calls her in a pejorative manner “Schauspielerkind, Komödientenkind, Filmkind” (GW 2: 116). She also holds Hillegonda’s parents in contempt. Her disrespect for Alexander and Messalina is to some extent justified. Both parents neglect their daughter and drown their moral and spiritual emptiness in alcohol (GW 2: 216). However, the nanny does not act upon her concern. Instead of helping Alexander and Messalina to find comfort in God, Emmi merely feels superior to the couple.

In her religious zeal, Emmi urges Hillegonda to confess her sins: “Noch vor dem Beichtalter sollte sie beichten, um von den Sünden losgesprochen zu werden” (GW 2: 82

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\(^8^2\) Pride is according to Catholic belief one of the seven deadly sins.
The nanny’s request is absurd. The little girl is far too young and does not know the meaning of sin: “Was sollte sie beichten? Hillegonda wußte es nicht. . . . Die Sünden der Eltern? Was waren das für Sünden? Hillegonda wußte es nicht” (GW 2: 115). Emmi must have told the child that her parents sinned against God. But Hillegonda fails, due to her young age, to grasp the Christian concepts of sin, atonement, and absolution. The little girl does not know that, according to the Christian faith, her parents’ generation sinned against God by either condoning or actively contributing to the Holocaust and World War Two. Nor is she cognizant of her parents’ present heedless and unethical lifestyle.

Koeppen’s frowning upon Emmi’s rigorous attempt to raise a little child in fear of God parallels Kierkegaard’s view in this matter. The religious philosopher asserts in his Concluding Unscientific Postscript that “if a child is not allowed, as it ought to be, to play innocently with the most holy, if in its existence it is rigorously coerced into decisively Christian qualifications, such a child will suffer a great deal” (601). Indeed, as a result of her stringent religious up-bringing and her nanny’s heartless methods, Hillegonda is tormented by fear: “Furcht vor Emmi, Furcht vor der Kirche, Furcht vor Gott bedrückte ihr kleines Herz; sie machte sich schwer, sie ließ sich ziehen, um den Weg zu verzögern, aber die Hand des Wächters zerrte sie weiter.” (GW 2: 15).

When she reluctantly enters the church building, the frightened little girl projects her own fear onto God and asks herself in all innocence: “Fürchtete sich auch Gott?” (GW 2:15). Through Hillegonda’s question, “Bereitete sich hier das Wunder vor, die Lossprechung der Eltern?,” Koeppen directs the postwar readers’ attention to Germany’s infamous past and their active or passive contribution to the suffering and death of millions of innocent people. With the girl’s query, the author also calls the Catholic
Church’s absolution powers into question. If one takes the priest’s aforementioned perfunctory performance of the Eucharist and the spiritual barrenness of the parish members into account, it seems that Koeppen intents his readership to negate Hillegonda’s question. As the author suggests, perfunctory prayers and rituals do not have the power to absolve people from their sins; God only forgives a sinner’s trespasses when he or she sincerely asks for forgiveness.

During Mass, the child asks her nanny if God is angry (GW 2: 116). The woman must have told Hillegonda that the Almighty is angry with her and her parents:


Hillegonda’s pure-hearted Christian spirit

When Josef, an old man and a former soldier of the Wehrmacht, is mugged in the vicinity of the church, Hillegonda hears the people’s screaming and “es war ihr, als ob
Steine gegen die Tür der Kirche geworfen würden” (*GW* 2: 159). She is afraid and asks her nanny what is happening. Emmi says that it is the devil and urges the child to pray (*GW* 2: 159). Josef is admitted to a hospital. His death scene is of special importance, because it reveals Hillegonda’s pure-hearted and genuine Christianity. Her natural compassion and brotherly love stand in sharpest contrast to her nanny’s adamant but misconceived Christianity.

Josef lies on his deathbed underneath a crucifix. A priest kneels beside him and Emmi kneels “mit einem viel strengerem Gesicht als der Geweihte Gottes” behind him (*GW* 2: 177). The narrator calls her a “Vertreterin einer unerbittlichen Religion” whose heart is so callous that she even believes that to die is a sin (*GW* 2: 177). Hillegonda stands in front of the bed and gazes, buried in thoughts, at the dying man. The priest performs the last rites and Emmi, the “grimmige kleine Gebetsmühle,” crosses herself and murmurs her “Vergib uns unsere Sünden” (*GW* 2: 178). When Josef passes away, the nanny explains to Hillegonda that the old man died in sin; that God is very strict; that “es gab kein Recht vor Gott;” and that everything is a sin (*GW* 2: 178). But the child doubts that this is true and silently objects: “[A]ber wenn alles Sünde war, dann war es doch ganz gleich, was man tat” (*GW* 2: 178). Looking at the old man, Hillegonda thinks that Josef looks kind and comes to the conclusion: “[M]an konnte also verbergen, daß man ein Sünder war; man sah es keinem an, wer er war; man konnte keinem trauen” (*GW* 2: 177). At the same time, Hillegonda begins to question her nanny’s integrity and asks herself, “war ihre Frömmigkeit vielleicht eine Maske, die den Teufel verbarg?” (*GW* 2: 178-79). In this manner, the author directs attention to human deceitfulness and hypocrisy.
and suggests that some of postwar Germany’s so-called believers are rather spiritually depraved.

The little child feels an overwhelming pity for Josef. She walks over to him, kisses his hand, “eine runzelige Hand mit Rillen voll Erde, voll Schmutz, voll Krieg und Leben,” and weeps bitter tears, which angers Emmi immensely (GW 2: 179). Indignant with the child, she tells the priest: “»Sie ist ein Schauspielerkind, Hochwürden. Lüge, Verstellung und Komödie liegen ihr im Blut. Strafen Sie das Kind, retten Sie seine Seele!«” (GW 2: 178-79). The priest is taken aback by the nanny’s somber piety, her cold-heartedness, and joylessness (GW 2: 179). But he is touched by Hillegonda’s sincere and inconsolable sobbing (GW 2: 180).

The heart as the seat of faith

In Josef’s death scene, Koeppen calls the soundness of his contemporaries’ religiosity into question. He suggests that some postwar Germans mistake a display of somber piety and adamant rules and regulations for true Christianity. Yet, the author indicates that mercy and compassion are essential qualities of an authentic Christian. In this context, the trilogy’s theme of the human heart, which I discussed in chapters one and two, is of great significance. According to Christian belief, the human heart is the seat of faith and a callous heart is a sign of a person’s ungodliness. Thus, Koeppen’s references to people’s cold, hardened, or even empty hearts serve not only as indicators of his characters’ immorality and impiety; they are also signposts for his readership.
Washington Price’s exemplary Christianity

Washington Price is also one of the few peripheral characters in Tauben im Gras who display genuine Christian qualities, such as love, compassion, kindness, care, thoughtfulness, selflessness, benevolence, and humility. The African-American belongs to the occupying forces that control the newly founded Federal Republics’ democratization and re-education process. During Germany’s hardest postwar years, he becomes acquainted with Carla Behrend. Like many of her contemporaries, Carla is near starvation and, thus begins a relationship with Washington: “[S]ie mußte was auftreiben, man war am Verhungern, die schlimmen Jahre fünfundvierzig, sechsundvierzig, siebenundvierzig, am Verhungern, sie mußte, warum sollte sie nicht? Waren es nicht auch Menschen?” (GW 2: 48). Without expecting anything in return, Washington generously gives the desperate young woman, as well as her friends, chocolate, soap, canned goods, and cigarettes to help her in this time of need and to mitigate her suffering (GW 2: 48-49). The selfless benefactor receives only casual thanks from Carla’s friends who conveniently ignore that all these goods cost Washington money (GW 2: 49). But their ingratitude does not keep him from doing what he perceives as right and good. “Er war der Engel” who cares for needy children in the neighborhood and treats Heinz Behrend, Carla’s son, like his own (GW 2: 74). Embarrassed by people’s hypocritical pity, “am meisten haßte es Heinz, wenn man ihm mit falschem Mitleid über den Kopf strich,” the boy avoids Washington whenever he can (GW 2: 75). Nonetheless, “der schwarze Ernährer der Familie, die gabenspendende und dennoch fremde und störende Erscheinung in der Wohnung beschäftigte ihn unaufhörlich (GW 2: 74-75). Although
Heinz pretends not to like the African-American and calls Washington publicly a nigger to fend off other people’s faux empathy, the man’s kind and charitable spirit make an impression on him (GW 2: 75).

When Carla Behrend gets pregnant, she opts, for very selfish reasons, for an abortion: “Das Kind musste weg. . . . Es war ein Fehler gewesen, sich mit Washington zu vereinigen” (GW 2:123). On the one hand, she is aware of her society’s prejudice against colored people and African-American’s animosity toward white people: “Weiße unerwünscht, Schwarze unerwünscht, es traf sie beides . . .” (GW 2: 63). On the other hand, Carla realizes that only a white American could provide her with the wealth, security, and comfort that she desires (GW 2: 123). She knows that Washington is “ein guter Kerl,” but she is willing neither to give up her dream of lazy felicitousness nor to cope with discrimination (GW 2:123). As the narrator points out,


As the cited passage reveals, Carla believes in social conventions rather than in God. Therefore, she does not hesitate either on moral or religious grounds to take her unborn child’s life. More important than the illumination of Carla’s idealization of social etiquette is Koeppen’s criticism of postwar Germans’ inadequate spirituality. As he implies in this passage, neither the perfunctory attendance of Mass on holidays nor the
pro forma act of participating in the celebration of the Eucharist makes one an authentic Christian.

Against all odds, Washington welcomes the unborn child. He truly loves his girlfriend and “sah das Kind seiner Liebe in Gefahr” (GW 2: 113). In contrast to Carla, he wishes to set an example: “Er wollte das Band, daß nun zu reißen drohte, das Band zwischen Weiß und Schwarz, nicht lösen, ... er wollte ein Beispiel geben, er glaubte an diese Möglichkeit des Beispiels, und vielleicht forderte auch sein Glaube Märtyr“ (GW 2: 160). With the inquiry “maybe his faith demanded martyrs,” Koeppen directs attention not only to Christ’s ultimate sacrifice for the sake of His principles and humankind’s salvation but also to Washington’s Christian spirit. The American adheres to God’s commandment “You shall not kill!” and is willing to make sacrifices for this moral principle. He is going to stay in Germany and to face discrimination and financial hardship in order to save the child.

Washington calls his parents and asks them for help “um das Kind zu retten” (GW 2: 61). They are simple but warmhearted people who are concerned but willing to support their son: “Washington will Geld vom Ersparten der Alten, er kündigt ihnen die Heirat an, das Kind, was wissen sie? Sie wissen. Verstrickung, der Sohn in Not. Nichts Gutes: Sünde. Oder nicht Sünde vor Gott, aber vor den Menschen” (GW 2: 61). In this manner, Koeppen impels his contemporaries, whether they are believers or not, to refrain from passing judgment and suggests that God does not condemn interracial relationships.

When Washington prevents the impending abortion, Carla rages:

Meinst, ich will deinen Bankert haben? Meinst, ich will ihn haben? Mit Fingern würden sie auf mich weisen. Ich pfeif auf dein Amerika. Auf dein dreckiges

For a moment, he is tempted to hit her. But Washington controls this evil impulse and rather acts upon what he perceives as morally right and good. He embraces Carla and says: “Aber wir lieben uns doch, warum sollen wir’s nicht durchstehen? Warum sollen wir’s nicht schaffen? Wir müssen uns nur immer lieben. Wenn alle anderen uns beschimpfen: wir müssen uns liebhaben. . . .” (GW 2: 161). With this passage, Koeppen stresses Washington’s faith in love and his willingness to ignore conventions and to endure adversity for his beliefs.

An attentive reader familiar with the Christian faith will notice that all of Washington’s discussed qualities are, according to the Bible, virtues that Jesus preached and practiced. Of special importance is that Koeppen offers Washington’s qualities, such as his kindness, selflessness, benevolence, compassion, and love, as potential moral and spiritual constants and as an antidote to his contemporaries’ nihilism. The author especially advocates the man’s exemplary courage to face life as a powerful remedy for his era’s despair. Only for a short moment, Washington loses hope and thinks “sein Leben sei sinnlos” (GW 2: 86). Full of despair, “empfand er die ganze Häßlichkeit des Daseins. Die Erde war kein Himmel. Die Erde war bestimmt kein Negerhimmel (GW 2: 86). But his courage to face life and adversity gains the upper hand and he finds comfort in the thought of bringing a new life into this world (GW 2: 86).

In contrast to Washington’s genuine Christianity, whether openly professed or not, Emmi’s spirituality falls short. As a reader well-versed in the Bible will notice, Emmi’s religiosity rather corresponds to the Pharisees’ spirituality, whose self-
righteousness and adamant rules and regulations were not justified in the eyes of God.  

With Emmi’s questionable demeanor, Koeppen casts the inadequate Christianity of postwar nominal Christians into bright light but hopes that his readers will reflect upon their own conduct and, if necessary, change it.

Faith in *Das Treibhaus*

Koeppen’s second postwar novel is an amalgamation of political facts, fiction, and a myriad of cultural, historical, literary, and biblical allusions. Embedded in this complex fabric is the author’s critical stance toward his era’s insubstantial Christianity which he illuminates at various places in *Das Treibhaus* via biblical references. Considering postwar politics’ turn to Christianity, it is surprising that the theme of the Church plays an infinitesimal role in *Das Treibhaus*. However, there might be one or two reasons for it. The following quote will shed some light on the issue in question:


The author’s allusion to Richard Wagner’s opera tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelung* dominates the passage and directs the reader’s attention to the doom of old and new power relations. As the quote reveals, there is something nebulous and potentially

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83 For Christ’s admonishment of the Pharisees see Luke: 11-52.
dangerous about West Germany’s political renovation. The Federal Railway that symbolizes the course of Adenauer’s politics is painted blood-red, which alludes to the country’s impending rearmament and potential human sacrifices. The phrase “Schlote des Reviers” refers to West Germany’s coal and steel industry, which was internationalized in 1951. Through a reference to the cunning dwarf Alberich, the antagonist of Der Ring des Nibelung, the author links this economic treaty – it was designed to strengthen the political relations between France and the Federal Republic – to greed and deceitfulness. Koeppen reinforces the negative associations with an allusion to Hitler, the “Fememörder Hagen,” who cost millions of people their lives. With the references to Basel, Vienna, Passau, Rome, Hoek van Holland, and London, he underscores that the Federal Republic’s politics are de facto international power relations and reminds the reader that the Roman Catholic Church is, metaphorically speaking, on board West Germany’s restoration express. However, the Catholic Church’s participation in postwar politics is, as the author implies, a veiled involvement, which could explain why it is not a prominent feature of the novel. In addition, the author might have recognized that an elaborate discussion of the Catholic Church’s engagement in postwar politics would have overshadowed the novel’s main theme – West Germany’s impending rearmament. However, Koeppen did question the sincerity of the government’s turn to Christianity in Das Treibhaus.

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84 For more information on this economic treaty that created a common European market for the coal and steel producing industry see Glees.
85 In essence, Konrad Adenauer, who came to be the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, was a strong willed statesman with great political acumen. As Glees points out, he was a very pragmatic politician who recognized immediately after Germany’s defeat that the country’s reform depended on the objectives of the occupying forces and that a Christian democracy with capitalistic, liberal, and especially Western features would find the approval of the Western allies (75). To have a say in postwar Germany’s politics, Adenauer needed a “democratic party to take him to power” (74). For a political movement to gain momentum, he recognized that it was necessary to fuse the country’s “political centre with the religiously
The Christianization of West Germany’s politics

The author’s portrayal of Sedesaum, one of the government’s fictitious delegates, sheds light on the issue in question. Keetenheuve states:

Sedesaum, der Froschmensch, hüpfte die Treppen herunter. . . . Sedesaum war Berufschrist, Gott möge ihm verzeihen, und da keine Kapelle in der Nähe war, hüpfte er allmorgenlich in den Milch- und Brötchenladen, ein Werk der Demut und Publicity zu tun . . . und außerdem war, was er hier unternahm, auch noch eine Tat der Toleranz, der Samariter unterstützte seinen gestrauchelten Bruder, und im Jenseits wurde abgerechnet. Sedesaum kaufte sein Frühstück bei Dörflich ein . . . ein aus seiner Fraktion ausgestoßener Abgeordneter, der aber noch nicht seine parlamentarischen Weihen verloren hatte (GW 2: 356).

Considering the instrumentality of Koeppen’s animal metaphors, as discussed in the previous chapter, Sedesaum’s frog-like qualities indicate that he lacks true compassion, which should be a Christian’s most prominent quality. As the quote demonstrates further, the “Berufschrist” uses his faux Christian principles, such as piety and mercy, for

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inspired Catholic and Protestant culture” and to combine “broad principles with a pragmatic approach to specific policies” (77). To this end, he helped founding the Christian Democratic Party, which soon came to be the Christian Democratic Union (74). In February 1946, he “was elected chairman of the Land executive of the Rhine CDU” and “began to assemble a core group of advisors and aids . . . to help him attain the Chancellorship (if it presented itself)” (79). His political endeavors to unite all of the country’s Christian and democratic powers proved to be successful (77). In April 1946, “the Christian Social Party of Bavaria, the CDUs of Württemberg, of north Baden, and of Greater Hesse and the CDU in the British and American zones all resolved to form a union” (79). In December 1946, Adenauer was elected chairman of the CDU (80). In November 1948, he was told that the Western military governments supported the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany and was asked to make the necessary arrangements (81). At this time, he also “began to develop his international and European reputation with a series of visits” (81). In 1949, Konrad Adenauer was elected Chancellor of the newly founded Federal Republic of Germany. On occasion of the second German federal election in 1953 and in strong opposition to Adenauer’s rearmament politics, Koeppen questions in *Das Treibhaus* the integrity of West Germany’s government.
publicity purposes. His rather unchristian features are emphasized once more when Keetenheuve, the novel’s protagonist, sarcastically remarks that Sedesaum “hüpfte klein, eitel und demütig, klein, fromm und schlau [aus dem Milchladen], und so würde er, die Milch und die Brötchen im runden Bäuchlein, klein, demütig und eitel, klein, schlau und fromm, in den Plenarsaal hüpfen” (GW 2: 358). The reversed reiteration of Sedesaum’s contradictory attributes leaves no doubt about his insubstantial spirituality. The author’s distrust in the government’s turn to Christianity comes to the fore in Sedesaum’s plenary speech that consists of the monotonous repetition of two key words, “Christ und Vaterland, Christ und Vaterland, Christ und Vaterland” (GW 2: 371). The trustworthiness of the speech is contested by Keetenheuve’s sarcastic interjection: “Christ und Welt?” (GW 2: 371). This way, Koeppen insinuates that the government stresses Christian principles for political rather than religious reasons.

Through Keetenheuve’s comparison of the chancellor’s political tactics to gambling, exchanging money, and playing cards, the author challenges the government’s supposedly Christian politics as follows:


The fatality of past and potential future wars, of old and new human sacrifices, the interconnectedness of steel production and weapon trade, of westernization politics and ceaseless power maneuvers dominate this passage and direct the reader’s attention to the chancellor’s morally questionable political tactics and remilitarization attempt. On a marginal note, it is interesting that Koeppen was not the only person who doubted Adenauer’s Christian principles. Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, once remarked that the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany “always ‘pretended to be the perfect little Christ’ whilst pushing his own policy to the utmost” (Glees100).

Keetenheuve, who vehemently opposes the government’s remilitarization intention on moral grounds, points out that “Lenin, Tschiangkaishek, Kaiser Wilhelm, Mussolini, Hitler und Stalin,” had initially presented themselves “im weißen Kleid der Engel” with a dove on their shoulder and a palm branch in their hands (GW 2: 280).

As Glees explains, the chancellor’s priority was from the start to achieve for the Federal Republic political equality among the Western powers (98). He recognized that crucial steps towards this goal were the Federal Republic’s fusion with the Western powers and the amelioration of Franco-German relations (99). To overcome the historical rivalry between the two nations, Adenauer temporarily considered delegating the Saarland with its coal and steel industry to France (102). He worked also closely with the United States, the leading occupying force, and promoted European integration through treaties. One of the economic pacts that merged Germany with the West was the European Coal and Steel Community, also known as Montanunion, which created a common European market for the coal and steel producing industry. The treaty was signed in 1951 by Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxemburg. Adenauer regarded this treaty as the first step towards the European Union. The political treaty that would ultimately integrate the Federal Republic into the West was the rearmament, which was a highly controversial foreign and domestic issue. It violated the Potsdam agreement that demilitarized Germany after WWII and the Petersburg agreement (103). Yet, America needed the Federal Republic as an ideological, economic, and military barrier against the Soviet Union and, thus, promoted the Federal Republic’s rearmament in spite of Britain’s and France’s objections (103). On the other hand, Germans in East and West feared that they had to fire at each other in case of a war and that the Federal Republic’s remilitarization would prevent or delay the country’s reunification.
Nonetheless, they eventually waged wars and sacrificed countless lives. Koeppen’s use of Christian symbolism in this passage – the dove stands for peace and the Holy Spirit; the palm branch represents “the victory of the faithful over the enemies of the soul” (Hassett online) – underscores the hypocrisy and ungodliness of the aforementioned political leaders. It seems that the author intends his readership to conclude that the chancellor’s rearmament intention endangers the “Frieden des Erdkreises” as much as the supposedly peaceful objectives of Lenin, Wilhelm II, Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin. That is not to say that Koeppen believed Adenauer to be downright evil. But, through the voice of Keetenheuve, the author indicates that “selbst wer das Gute wollte, wurde leicht zu einem Mephistopheles, der stets das Böse schafft” (GW 2: 281).

The endangerment of peace on earth is picked up in another narrative sequence, in which the protagonist takes a leisurely walk along the Rhine, notices a rainbow, and thinks:


In consideration of the government’s rearmament intention and the menace of the Cold War, the author hopes that his readership will negate the protagonist’s questions. In Koeppen’s view, nothing good can come from West-Germany’s remilitarization. A reader well-versed in the Bible will notice that Koeppen alludes in this passage to God’s covenant with Noah via the Christian symbol of the rainbow. The author challenges

88 According to the Bible, when God saw how bad human corruptness and violence had become, He sent a flood to wipe humanity from the face of earth. However, God spared the upright Noah and his kin by
with this symbol the integrity of the chancellor’s and his government’s Christianity and implies that a treaty with God is a better guarantor of peace on earth than political treaties and rearmament.

In another narrative sequence, Keetenheuve degrades the chancellor’s Christian integrity to a great degree by comparing him not only to a bellwether who unswervingly leads the herd into the slaughterhouse but also to an untrustworthy shepherd:


The author utilizes in this passage the Christian symbol of the shepherd to emphasize the chancellor’s insubstantial Christianity. By contrasting the politician’s morally questionable conduct with Christ’s genuine humanitarian concern, Koeppen hopes that his readership will reach the conclusion that the chancellor misleads the German people under the guise of Christianity. The author reinforces this notion through Keetenheuve’s sarcastic remark, “Optik ist alles” (GW 2: 383).

In short, Koeppen’s presents the Bonn-Republic not only as a “Treibhaus” where morally questionable ideas are artificially cultivated but also as a potential slaughterhouse whose executives are ruled by questionable desires rather than by Christian principles.

ordering him to build an ark. After the flood, He promised Noah: “Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Then God said: “Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth (Genesis 9: 16). Thus, Christians perceive in the rainbow a sign of faith, conciliation, and peace.

In Christian theology, the good shepherd represents Christ.
Through the voice of Keetenheuve, the author suggests that it might be better for the sake of the German people and peace on earth to abandon “den Weg des Raubtiers” and to genuinely walk “den Pfad des Lammes,” i.e., to follow the ultimate peacemaker, Christ, the Lamb of God (GW 2: 370).

Koeppen underscores this notion through a reference to the biblical story of Jonah. Keetenheuve recalls the story as follows:

Der Prophet Jona wurde ins Meer geworfen, der Walfisch verschlang ihn . . . ,

drei Tage und drei Nächte saß Jona im Leibe des gewaltigen Fisches, . . . und

Jona betete zu Gott aus dem Bauch der Hölle, aus der Finsternis, . . . und Gott

machte sich dem Walfisch verständlich, und befahl dem braven . . . Tier, den

Propheten wieder auszuspeien. . . . Und Jona ging nach Ninive, in die große Stadt,

und er predigte Es sind noch vierzig Tage, so wird Ninive untergehen, und da das

vor den König von Ninive kam, stand er auf von seinem Thron, legte seinen

Purpur ab und hüllte einen Sack um sich und legte sich in die Asche. Ninive tat

Buße vor dem Herrn, aber Jona verdroß es, daß sich der Herr Ninives erbarmte

und es rettete (GW 2: 378-79).

The protagonist compares then the prophet’s situation with his own: “Keetenheuve fühlte

sich vom Walfisch verschlungen. Auch er saß in der Hölle, auch er saß tief unter dem

Meeresspiegel, auch er im Leib des großen Fisches” (GW 2: 379). In other words, the

representative of the opposition, who vehemently objects to the government’s

rearmament intention, feels powerless to change what he perceives as morally

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90 According to the Book of Jonah, God told Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach against its wickedness. The prophet refused initially to do so and fled in a ship from God. The Lord sent a violent storm that threatened to destroy the ship and everyone on board. Because Jonah knew that the storm was his fault, he asked his comrades to throw him into the sea. This is where Koeppen picks up the story.
unacceptable. However, in contrast to the self-opinionated Jonah, who was upset that God was pleased with the king’s and Nineveh’s repentance and atonement for their sins, the politician asserts:

Aber von Gott gerettet, ausgespien aus dem Bauch des Wales, würde Keetenheuve zwar Ninives Untergang verkünden, aber groß wäre seine Freude, wenn der König seinen Purpur ablegen würde, ablegen den aus einem Maskenverleih geborgten Königsmantel, und Ninive gerettet wäre (GW 2: 379).

In my view, the author’s reference to the biblical story of Jonah, as well as Keetenheuve’s reflection upon the narrative, is immensely important. On the one hand, Koeppen challenges once more the chancellor’s Christian principles by stressing his morally questionable, presumptuous, and pretentious conduct. On the other hand, which is even more important in the context of the shockingly cruel and inhumane course of the Third Reich, Koeppen directs his contemporaries’ attention to God’s mercy and suggests that their sins will be forgiven if they genuinely repent their sins and conform to His principles.

Church and faith in *Der Tod in Rom*

In his last postwar novel, Koeppen criticized the Roman Catholic Church to a great extent but not the Protestant Church. In respect to worldly power, the author certainly viewed the Protestant Church as a harmless institution. In any case, the author’s criticism of the Roman Catholic Church has to be seen in the context of West Germany’s revivification of Christianity. As already explained at the beginning of this chapter, the
author was concerned that many of his contemporaries simply turned after Hitler’s downfall to the Church in search of a new master. Worried about his contemporaries’ tendency to blindly conform to authority, the author guided them to carefully examine their new master, the Catholic Church. To stimulate and strengthen his readership’s awareness of genuine Christianity, Koeppen called into question the past and then present role, function, and integrity of the Catholic Church from various angles.

Koeppen’s choice of Rome as the setting for his novel is ideal, since the history of both the city and the Catholic Church are closely related. Through references to Rome’s and the Vatican’s historic sites, buildings, and artifacts, the author conjures the history of the Roman Catholic Church. He mediates the subject matter through the viewpoints of Judejahn, Siegfried, and Adolf. The narrator conveys the Nazi-general’s, the protagonist’s, and the young deacon’s impressions and opinions and adds his own thoughts. Because of his blatant criticism of the Catholic Church, the reader might get the impression that Koeppen distanced himself from Christianity, which is not the case. As I will show, the author acknowledged his contemporaries’ need for spiritual constants and offered in *Der Tod in Rom* genuine faith as a potential antidote to the young generation’s existential crisis, as well as a possible means for the older generation’s salvation.

The early Church

Through the narrator’s references to ancient Ostia (GW 2: 479), the first Roman colony, to the wolf that suckled Romulus and Remus (GW 2: 393), the legendary founders of Rome, to Saint Peter’s upside-down crucifixion (GW 2: 498), and to
Christianized temples (GW 2: 479-80), the author alludes to the rise and fall of the Roman Empire and to the ascent of both Christianity and the Roman Catholic Church. As a reader well-versed in history knows, the decline of the Roman dominance in Western Europe and the Church’s rise to ecclesiastical and political power in the West went hand in hand. Through Siegfried, who walks meditatively along the Viale del Muro Torto in the vicinity of the Villa Medici and the gardens of the Villa Borghese, the author suggests that the Church used questionable means on its way to power:

Macht hatte diese Gärten geschaffen, Macht die Villen, Macht die Paläste, Macht die Stadt gebaut, Macht die Mauer errichtet, Macht hatte die Schätze herbeigeholt, Macht die Kunst angeregt, die Stadt war schön, . . . aber die Macht war für die Mitlebenden stets schrecklich, war Machtmäßbrauch, war Gewalt, war Unterdrückung, war Krieg, war Brandstiftung und Meuchelmord, Rom war auf Erschlagenen gebaut, selbst Kirchen standen auf blutbesudelter Erde, kein Tempel, keine Basilika, kein Dom war ohne vergossenes Blut zu denken (GW 2: 546-47).

With this passage, Koeppen directs attention to the early Church’s slaughter of human beings in the name of God, as well as to the medieval Church’s misuse of power. However, the Church’s willingness to sacrifice human life to further its cause violates, according to Christian beliefs, God’s sixth Commandment, “You shall not murder.” Thus, the narrator ironically states: “Der alte Pontifex maximus im alten Rom hatte das Gebot nicht gekannt. Er sah freundlich den Gladiatorenkämpfen zu. Der Pontifex maximus im neuen Rom war ein Diener des Dekalogs, er ließ das Gebot lehren, er befahl,
es zu halten” (GW 2: 465). Nonetheless, as the author indicates, later popes shed blood as well.

The medieval Catholic Church

Via Adolf and Gottlieb Judejahn’s visit to the papal fortress, Castel Sant’ Angelo, Koeppen brings into focus the medieval Catholic Church’s belligerent power machinations and the Roman inquisition that was responsible for the persecution, torture, and murder of numerous people. The fortified castle is part of the Vatican and served in the Middle Ages as a shelter for popes in times of danger. The narrator discloses that this papal fortress is equipped with a dungeon and a torture chamber:


Koeppen conjures here a horrid picture of human suffering. As the passage discloses, not only the actions of the primitive but also of the medieval Roman Catholic Church violated at times essential Christian principles, such as love, mercy, and forgiveness.92

91 The Roman inquisition was developed in the 16th century by the Catholic Church. These tribunals interrogated and passed judgment on people who were accused of heresy, sorcery, blasphemy, or witchcraft.
92 Via Adolf, the author directs also attention the medieval Church’s crusades (GW 2: 462).
Through the former SS-general’s blasé reaction to Castel Sant’Angelo’s display of its historic weapons, suits of armor, armaments, and torture paraphernalia, the author moves the medieval Catholic Church’s belligerence, cruelty, and inhumanity into the foreground. The narrator states:

Judejahn war durch die Engelsburg gegangen, er hatte Waffen und Rüstungen und Kriegsgerät gesehen, . . . nichts Neues gab es aus alter Zeit zu sehen, er kannte das, . . . er fühlte sich in seinem Handwerk bestätigt und ging wirklich selbstsicher und gelangweilt wie einer, der nach langer Abwesenheit sein altes Haus besichtigte, in die Verliese hinunter. . . (GW 2: 509).

The old Nazi is not surprised by the medieval Catholic Church’s ruthless methods and assures the reader: “Kriege und Kerker, Gefangenschaft und Tod, immer hatte es sie gegeben, Petrus war am Marterkreuz gestorben, und seine Amtswalter hatten den Marertod ihren Feinden bestellt, so würde es bleiben, und so war es gut. Es war menschlich. Wer sprach von Unmenschlichkeit? (GW 2: 509). In short, the emotionally hardened and morally depraved Nazi excuses the Catholic Church’s then immoral and unchristian conduct by arguing that violence, cruelty, and murder are age-old human characteristics. By comparing the medieval Catholic Church’s methods to the means that the Nazi’s applied to achieve their end, the author emphasizes the ecclesiastical institution’s barbarism in the Middle Ages. However, as the author implies, the end does not justify the means. Through Judejahn’s question, “who spoke of inhumanity?,” i.e., humankind’s lack of compassion and consideration of others, Koeppen directs attention
to Christ’s exemplary teachings in the hope that his readership will recognizes the flawed Christianity of the medieval Catholic Church.  

Adolf Judejahn’s reaction to the Catholic Church’s abominable torture methods stands in sharpest contrast to his father’s insensitive response. In the deepest dungeon of the papal fortress, the young deacon beholds a gruesome vessel:


This passage paints an even ghastlier picture of the unchristian methods that the medieval Catholic Church applied to further its cause. As the author indicates, some people’s conversion to Christianity was not brought about by divine grace but by brute human force. Adolf is tremendously shocked when he realizes that his Church used in the Middle Ages torture to convert heathens and heretics to Catholicism and prays full of compassion and in an ardent manner for the souls of the unknown prisoners, which reveals the young deacon’s genuine Christianity (GW 2: 506).

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93 According to the Bible, Jesus said: “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God” (Matthew 5: 7-9).
To stress the discrepancy between the medieval Catholic Church’s concealed cruelty and its public role as a patron of Christian virtue, knowledge, and the arts, the author contrasts Castel Sant’Angelo’s basement with its upper chambers. As the narrator points out, above the fortress’ torture chamber and dungeon are the papal “Festgemächer, die traulichen Wohnungen, die geschmückten Kapellen, lebte der wache Sinn für die Kunst, waren schöne und fromme Bilder, geschnitzte Betschemel, die silbernen Leuchter Cellinis, in der Bibliothek freute man sich an Büchern, nahm Weisheit auf, erbaute sich, hörte vielleicht Musik . . .” (GW 2: 505-06). Through the reference to Castel Sant’Angelo’s library and Cellini’s silver candlesticks, Koeppen directs his readership’s attention to the Catholic Church’s role in the Italian Renaissance and its worldly pride.94

The author stresses the ecclesiastical institution’s worldliness through Adolf’s visit of St. Peter’s Basilica. The young priest reflects on the building’s formidable pomp and thinks, “Säulenpracht Säulenpracht Säulenpracht, Bramante, Raffael, Michelangelo, wer dachte ihrer hier nicht . . .” (GW 2: 500). As a reader familiar with art history will know, Bramante, Raffael, and Michelangelo were famous Italian Renaissance artists and protégés of Pope Julius II, Pope Clemens VII, and Pope Leo X. Donato Bramante (1444 -1514) was the architect who was charged by Pope Julius II to build St. Peter’s Basilica. Raffaello Sanzio (1484-1520) was the painter who was tasked by Pope Julius II and his successor, the Medici Pope Leo X, to fresco several rooms in the Vatican Palace. Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni (1475 -1564) was a painter, sculptor, and architect. Among his most famous works are his frescos in the Sistine Chapel that depict scenes from the book of Genesis and his Pietà, a marble sculpture that portrays the body

94 Benvenuto Cellini (1500-1571) was a famous Renaissance goldsmith, painter, sculptor, musician, and protégé of the Medici Pope Clemens VII.
of Christ on Mary’s lap after His crucifixion. He also designed the dome of St. Peter’s Basilica. During his lifetime, Michelangelo was commissioned by Pope Julius II, Medici Pope Leo X, and Medici Pope Clemens VII. In this context, Siegfried’s aforementioned assertion that power has built the gardens, villas, and palaces of Rome, has accumulated wealth, and has promoted the arts is significant. It underscores the medieval Catholic Church’s worldly pride and riches and the institution’s political connections, influence, and might. However, as the author insinuates, the Catholic Church’s concern with mundane affairs collide with the Christian principles that the spiritual institution preaches.

Through Adolf’s reflection on the worldly pomp of St. Peter’s Basilica, the author emphasizes the Catholic Church’s presumptuousness and incredible power status during the Renaissance. As the narrator points out, “Adolf fühlte sich einsam in der weiten prächtigen Erhabenheit, die ihm gar nicht so erhaben vorkommen wollte, es sei denn im hochmütigen Sinn des Wortes” (GW 2: 501). The young deacon admirers the beauty of the basilica, yet, he notices that there is something cold about it. He deems the columns of the building to be lustrous but cold; he finds the church’s stucco magnificent but cold; and he regards the floor’s ornament admirable but cold (GW 2: 500). In my view, the author juxtaposes in this passage the breath-taking grandiosity of the building’s architectural features and the inner haughtiness and hard-heartedness of the medieval Catholic Church. He also illuminates in this narrative section the ecclesiastical institution’s astute political maneuvers:

Karl der Große ritt, ein kalter Mann, auf einem kalten Pferd, . . . und dort war die Porphyryplatte, auf welcher der Kaiser gekrönt wurde, Gußgestein, Kristalle von

In this passage, the author brings Charlemagne’s and the Holy Roman Empire’s foreign conquests into focus. Charles the Great was anointed and crowned in 800 by Pope Leo III in the basilica of St. Peter. During his reign, he defended the Roman Catholic Church and promoted Christianity. Nonetheless, during Charlemagne’s time, the struggle for political dominance between the papacy and the Holy Roman Empire began, which answers Adolf’s question, “why did the Church make common cause with emperors and generals?”

The Catholic Church in the modern era

Through the voice of the narrator, Koeppen points out that “es gab eine Zeit, sie war noch nicht so lange her, da beschäftigten die Päpste sogar Henker, Menschen wie Judejahn, und wie viele Feldherren hatten die Päpste geehrt, und wie oft hatten sie die siegreichen Standarten gesegnet!” (GW 2: 466). That is to say, the author insinuates that the Catholic Church also made common cause in recent history with political and military leaders and sanctioned their belligerence. The author alludes with the phrase, “people like Judejahn,” to German and Italian fascists, such as Hitler and Mussolini. Then, the narrator asks a pivotal question: “Warum übersah man sie nicht in Purpur und in Fräcken, in lamettabehängten Uniformen und schlichten Diktorenjoppen, warum erkannte man
sie nicht, die sich für schmutzige Händel, für Freßlust und Fickgier, für Gold und Landbesitz und gemeine Herrschsucht mit Gott verbündeten und das Kreuz mißbrauchen wollten? (GW 2: 500). In other words, Koeppen implies here, as already discussed in chapters one and two, that authorities, may they be clergymen, kings, statesmen, or generals, blind people’s senses by their impressive appearance and their staged spectacle of power and benevolence and, thus, impair people’s judgment. In another scene, the narrator comments, “gern gibt sich der Wolf als Schäfer aus, kleidet der Räuber sich als Hirte; Könige, Tyrannen, Diktatoren, Präsidenten weiden ihre Lämmer, scheren ihre Schafe, schlachten ihre Herde zu eigenem Nutzen,” which supports this argument (GW 2: 498-99). Based on the narrator’s aforementioned reference to crimson attire, it seems that Koeppen’s criticism targets also high-ranking church officials. The passage speaks of gluttony, lechery, greed, ruthless ambitions, and shrewd political and financial stratagems, which are unethical characteristics that defined many medieval popes, cardinals, and bishops. That is to say, the author suggests that not only worldly powers have misused the name of God and governed under the guise of Christianity but also the Catholic Church. The protagonist’s thoughts support my argument in that he reflects upon the conduct of priests and concludes: “Sie berufen sich auf Gott, um zu herrschen” (GW 2: 453).

With the pope’s prayer scene, Koeppen questions the pontiff’s Christian integrity and spiritual power. The narrator states:

Der Papst betete. Er . . . kniete auf den mit Purpur belegten Stufen des Altars, ein Bild des Gekreuzigten blickte auf ihn herab, ein Bild der Mutter Gottes schaute ihn an, . . . der Papst betete für die Christen und für die Feinde der Christenheit,
... er betete für die Priester in aller Welt und betete für die Gottesleugner in aller Welt, er bat Gott, die Regierungen der Länder nach seinem Willen zu erleuchten, und ... er erflehte die Fürbitte der Mutter Gottes für Bankiers, Gefangene, Henker, Polizisten, Soldaten, für Atomforscher und die Kranken und Krüppel von Hiroshima, für Arbeiter und Kaufleute, für Radrennfahrer und Fußballspieler, der Papst betete für die Christen und für die Feinde der Christenheit, ... kraft seiner Weihen segnete er die Völker und die Rassen, und der Gekreuzigte blickte schmerzlich auf ihn hinunter, und die Mutter Gottes schaute ihn lächelnd, aber traurig an, ... und der Heilige Vater ... bat auch für seine Ratgeber, für seine spitzfindigen Rechtsgelehrten, für seine geldkundigen Finanzberater, seine weltgewandten Diplomaten ... (GW 2: 479-80).

In this scene, the author contrasts the pope’s spiritual role with his mundane function. The pope’s prayers for Christians and non-Christians, his blessing of all the people and races of this world, and his intercession on behalf of common people bring his office’s spiritual facets to the fore. However, through the allusion to Christ’s and the Holy Mother’s sad countenance, Koeppen calls into question the pope’s spiritual profundity and his *ex officio* authority.

In respect to the pontiff’s religiosity, it is significant that the pope’s prayers follow a downward spiral that begins with his laudable concern for Christendom and humanity, descends to his profane plea for soccer players and racing cyclists, and reaches the bottom with his mundane prayer for his savvy legal advisors, shrewd financial consultants, and sophisticated nuncios. It is unclear, whether the author intends the reader to relate Christ’s and Mary’s sadness to the pope’s worldliness, or whether he
intends his readership to associate Jesus’ and the Holy Mary’s mournfulness to the pontiff’s claim of spiritual authority on the grounds of his religious office. Perhaps, Koeppen wishes his contemporaries to view the head of the Catholic Church, measured by Christian principles, as both a worldly and a pretentious human being. In any case, the author presents the Bishop of Rome, who is by virtue of his office both head of state and head of government of Vatican City, as a powerful secular authority whose integrity ought to be questioned like the uprightness of any other worldly power, even more so, because he is not just any head of government, but of Catholicism’s headquarters.

Once again, the author stresses via the narrator the religious institution’s secular characteristics. On his way from the papal fortress to the basilica of St. Peter, Adolf worries whether his spirituality will stand up to this sacred place of pilgrimage and whether this sanctum will bolster his faith. The narrator states:

Of special importance here are the Catholic institution’s distinctly corporate features, the author’s reference to Christ, and the young priest’s spiritual concerns. Through the narrator’s comparison of the Vatican’s edifices to insurance palaces, administration buildings of notable capital companies, and business offices of prospering trusts, Koeppen insinuates that the Catholic Church is a tremendously affluent and influential corporation. However, according to the Bible, Jesus cleared the temple area of people who conducted business in this sacred place and chided them for transforming God’s house of prayer into a den of thieves. Through this biblical reference, the author underscores the unchristian aspect of the religious institution’s business enterprises. Thus, Adolf’s fear that his faith might not live up to the Vatican’s sacredness is unfounded.

Once again, the author implies through the narrator’s voice that the Catholic Church’s religiosity deviates from genuine Christianity. The narrator states that once upon a time “entblößte Armut war an diesem Platz“ and mocks, “so ist die Welt, nicht zu dulden gewesen“ (GW 2: 497). To ridicule the ecclesiastical institution’s past and present pride and seemingly insatiable desire for wealth and power, he comments on the medieval mendicant orders, whose members depended on alms and sneers that these friars are probably extinct (GW 2: 497).

The narrator speaks then of the Catholic Church’s “kluger Bodennutzung“ and its successful financial speculations, which he deems as “Triumph dieser Welt und ein spätes Siegesmal Simons des Zauberers” (GW 2: 497). This biblical allusion is of crucial importance. According to the Bible, Simon the sorcerer boasted that he possessed great

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96 In this context, it is significant that Judejahn views the Via della Conciliazione, the grandiloquent street that leads to the basilica of St. Peter, as “Weltausbeutergasse” (GW 2: 422).
powers and amazed the Samarians with his magic. They followed Simon until the apostles Peter and John came to Samaria and announced the kingdom of God and preached in the name of Christ. The Samaritans accepted the word of God and were baptized. Since the people received the Holy Spirit when the apostles touched people with their hands, Simon the sorcerer wished to possess this power and offered Peter and John money for it. But Peter chided him and said: “May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God” (Acts 8: 20). In my view, Koeppen suggests through the allusion to Simon the sorcerer that the Catholic Church posses no divine authority but blinds people with its self-proclaimed power, its influence, and its wealth. He insinuates also that the ecclesiastical institution’s ways of the world will not find God’s approval.

The author reinforces this notion as follows. As the narrator points out, in St. Peter “hantierten geschäftige Geistliche” (GW 2: 500). He describes them as “fromme Männer von reinem Wandel,” yet, he points out that they are also “Angestellte oder Beamte, die ihren Dienst verrichteten, ihr Pensum erledigten” (GW 2: 500). Then, he comments, “ kam einem dieser schlechte alle Verzauberung aufhebende Gedanke, dann wurden die Altäre zu Verkaufstischen in einem weitläufigen Warenhaus” (GW 2: 500). The narrator argues here that the Catholic Church’s outward piety generally hinders people from questioning its integrity. In his view, the Catholic Church is a successful business, whose employees perform their duties most efficiently like clerks in an influential bank (GW 2: 500). Siegfried reinforces the narrator’s view when he speaks of the Church’s “festgefahrenen” rituals (GW 2: 481). Adolf particularly objects to the
Once again, the author alludes to Christ’s removal of business people from the temple to underscore the institution’s worldliness, and he suggests that the Catholic Church lacks genuine care and compassion, which are two pivotal Christian attributes.

Koeppen reinforces the ecclesiastical institution’s lack of brotherly love and benevolence as follows. Adolf received a sum of money from his father. Initially, Adolf intended to put the banknotes into the church’s offertory, yet he changes his mind after a moment of reflection: “Die Armenpflege der Kirche war säuerlich, sie war säuerlich wie jede Armenpflege und roch nach Bettelsuppen; das Geld zerrann in Bettelsuppen. Adolf wollte mit dem Geld Freude bereiten” (GW 2: 571). Since the young cleric does not trust the ecclesiastical institution’s care of the poor, he puts the money into the wrinkly hand of an old woman who asks at the entrance of the church Santa Maria degli Angeli for alms (GW 2: 571). In short, Adolf substantiates God’s second greatest law – love your neighbor as yourself – by mitigating the poor woman’s distress, while his Church, who views itself as the representative of Christ on earth, fails to meet, in Koeppen’s view, this Christian standard.97

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97 According to the Bible, Jesus was asked which of the Lord’s commandments is the greatest and he replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:36-40).
Adolf’s doubt and faith

Koeppen counterbalances his criticism of the Catholic Church by choosing a Catholic cleric to exemplify genuine faith. That is not to say that Adolf Judejahn never falters in his faith. To the contrary, the author describes him as a person who is on the verge of succumbing to “krausen Gedanken, krausem Leid, krauser Erschütterung” and on the brink of losing his belief in God (GW 2: 501). In this respect, Adolf shares his time’s emotional, mental, and spiritual dilemma. Like other members of the young generation, he suffers the effects of his national-socialist upbringing, has conflicting feelings about his parents who he holds responsible for the Third Reich, and questions everything, including his faith, the integrity of his Church, and God. However, through the novel’s protagonist, the author emphasizes: “Der Zweifel des Ungläubigen an seinem Unglauben ist mindestens so schrecklich wie der Zweifel des Gläubigen. Und wir zweifeln alle. . . Im Käfig der unseren Sinnen erreichbaren drei Dimensionen kann es nur Zweifler geben” (GW 2: 546). Nonetheless, Adolf always acts upon what he perceives as right and good and eventually masters his spiritual crisis, which makes him an excellent role model for postwar Germans who lost faith in their moral and spiritual potential.

The young deacon is attending a theological seminar in Rome. When he finds out that his whole family is in the city, Adolf is, more or less, terrified. Thus far, he has not come to terms with his older family members’ national-socialist past. His parents, Gottlieb and Eva Judejahn, still believe in the Third Reich’s ideology and show no sign of remorse, and his aunt and uncle, Anna and Friedrich Wilhelm Pfaffrath, are also deep-rooted national-socialists. Adolf’s cousin, Siegfried, who turned his back on his family to
liberate himself from the ballast of the Third Reich, is also in Rome for the premiere of his symphony. The young cleric visits Siegfried, who barely recognizes his cousin in his priestly outfit. Like Adolf, the protagonist is taken aback when he finds out that his family is in the city. He refuses to have any contact with them but tolerates Adolf’s presence and listens to his concerns.

Through Siegfried, the reader learns that Adolf has been conditioned from early childhood on by Nazi ideology. Adolf’s father, Gottlieb Judejahn, and his uncle, Friedrich Wilhelm Pfaffrath, have been high-ranking Nazis. Thus, young Adolf attended with his cousins, Dietrich and Siegfried, a military school for future Nazi leaders (*GW* 2: 458). When the Allies marched into Germany, Adolf’s Nazi-indoctrination came to an abrupt halt. The trainers told the children to go home and fled (*GW* 2: 459). Due to the collapse of the world as he knew it, Adolf experienced a mental void. The protagonist describes it as “eine absolute Leere” and that it was as if everything “was er bisher gedacht und gelernt hatte, nun ausgeräumt war, um vielleicht einem neuen Denken, einer neuen Lehre Platz zu machen, aber das wußte man noch nicht” (*GW* 2: 461). Through Siegfried’s statement, Koeppen reminds his reader that the breakdown of the Third Reich allowed for a fresh start and a different way of thinking, which can be interpreted as both a monition and an incentive.

On the way home, young Adolf encountered a Jew of his age who escaped from a nearby concentration camp. When the emaciated Jew noticed that Adolf was crying, he crawled out of his hiding place, threatened him with a stick, and shouted for bread (*GW* 2: 460). The weakened Jew was by no means a match for the well-fed German boy. Despite his military training, Adolf did not put up a fight but handed the needy Jew his
ration (GW 2: 460). The boy shared the food with Adolf. Due to starvation, the Jew was unable to process the food, vomited, and started to shiver. Adolf noticed his deplorable condition and gave the other boy his jacket. The protagonist, who does not believe in people’s ethical potentiality, asserts: “Er tat es nicht aus Mitleid. Er tat es nicht aus Liebe. Nicht einmal aus Scham deckte er den Jungen zu. Er tat es einfach, weil der andere zu frieren schien,” which might be true (GW 2: 461). It is more than likely that neither his national-socialist parents nor his military instructors taught Adolf the concepts of love and mercy. Nonetheless, the boy instinctively does what is right and good. Later on, the two children exchanged jackets. They warmed each other during the night and parted in the morning on good terms (GW 2: 462). Not knowing what to do, Adolf walked to the nearest village and fell asleep in a church. There he was found by a priest. The rest is history. Via Siegfried, Koeppen asks then a pivotal question: “War es Berufung? Hatte Gott ihn gerufen?” (GW 2: 462). There is no definite answer to this question. However, seen from a Christian perspective, Adolf’s natural brotherly love, i.e., his care for another’s well-being, makes him worthy in the eyes of God. As can be deduced from Adolf’s childhood story, Koeppen signals to postwar Germany’s young generation, whether they believe it or not, that they have a moral and spiritual capacity in spite of their upbringing.

Although his Nazi-indoctrination was left unfinished, Adolf is haunted, like other members of postwar Germany’s young generation, by his national-socialist upbringing. The narrator states:

Wenn er allein war, wenn er mit einem sprach, mit den Mitdiakonen, den gebildeten Lehrern der Priesterseminare, mit seinem Beichtvater, dann war Adolf
As the quote demonstrates, the author concedes that it is extremely difficult to break with the past. Yet, he also conveys that turning to God and confiding in spiritual people might be helpful.

Due to the Third Reich’s unspeakable immorality and cruelty, Adolf has lost trust in humanity. Yet, unlike many postwar German intellectuals, he chooses faith over nihilism: “Er glaubte den Menschen nicht mehr. Er wollte dem Herrn dienen. Gott Vater Sohn und heiliger Geist” (GW 2: 462-63). Of course, the cynical Siegfried, a hard-headed nihilist who disbelieves in humanity’s moral and spiritual potential, questions his cousin’s faith. He is convinced that Adolf was afraid of freedom, searched for a new master, and merely imagined that God has called him (GW 2: 468). Through the protagonist’s accusation, Koeppen calls into question his contemporaries’ turn to Christianity and impels religious readers to examine their spiritual integrity, which is exactly what the young priest does.

The self-conscious and self-critical Adolf reflects upon his priesthood. He is fully aware that he pledged his allegiance to God to distance himself from this world’s morally questionable endeavors and from the “tobsüchtige Walten der Geschichte” (GW 2: 499). However, he is unable to keep the world at bay:

[I]mmer wieder, wenn Welt und Geschichte . . . sich in sein Denken drängten, zweifelte er, ob er sich mit dem Anziehen des Priesterkleides wirklich von all
In this passage, the author suggests that humans are social beings and influenced by outer forces. He implies further that everyone, including the representatives of the Catholic Church, are, whether willingly or unwillingly, involved in the world’s machinations. In other words, in Koeppen’s view, faith and Christianity do not grant immunity from the world.

Many ordained priests stay in Adolf’s hostel. The despondent deacon questions their vocation as follows. He ponders “ob Gott sie erwählt, ob Gott sie gesandt hatte, ehrgeizige Raben und schüchterne Vogelscheuchen, und er zweifelte, denn warum hatte Gott dann nicht mehr getan, warum wehrten seine Diener sich nicht entschiedener gegen der Welt unglücklichen Lauf?” (GW 2: 485). It seems to the brooding Adolf that “er auch als Priester neues Unglück kaum hindern werde,” and he asks himself “ob er unbeteiligt bleiben könne in der anfechtbaren Rechtlichkeit des Pharisäers“ (GW 2: 485). Via this biblical reference, the author implies in this passage that pointing fingers at the world’s wrongdoings without trying to make a difference is hypocritical. Adolf is further torn between God’s fifth commandment, “honor your father and your mother” and his desire to break with his parents, who he rightfully blames for the immoral course of the Third Reich. Full of doubt, he quarrels with God about all the evil in this world and asks: “Wozu wozu wozu?” (GW 2: 485) Yet, as the narrator ironically states, “in dem Zwielicht der Herberge aus dummer sinnloser Freudlosigkeit und sinnwidriger säuerlicher Frömmigkeit erschien ihm Christus nicht. . .” (GW 2: 485). Once again,
Koeppen frowns upon people’s misconception of Christianity and suggests that God cannot be found in a joyless seclusion from the world.

On his way to St. Peter’s Basilica, Adolf is surrounded by a large number of people. The crowd awakes in him the memory of the Nazis’ manipulation and abuse of the masses, and the pomp of the Via della Conciliazione reminds him of the Reichsparteitagegelände in Nuremberg and the party rallies that he attended with his father (GW 2: 497). Adolf had hoped that a visit to St. Peter’s Basilica would strengthen his faith. However, the sanctum’s worldly grandiosity enhances his inner turmoil, and he feels his faith slipping away:

Adolf . . . fühlte sich von Gott und von seinem Glauben an Gott verlassen, er fühlte sich von Zweifeln bedrängt, vielleicht vom Teufel versucht, der vielleicht gar kein Teufel war, denn wie hätte ein Teufel in das Haus Gottes, ein Teufel in die Burg Petri, ein Teufel in die vielfach geweihte Stätte gelangen können . . . (GW 2: 501).

In this passage, the author stresses the young priest’s faltering faith that is apparently expedited by the sacred place’s prideful worldliness. Considering the author’s criticism of the Catholic Church’s boastfulness during the Italian Renaissance, it is highly ironic that it is Michelangelo’s marble sculpture, which depicts the body of Christ on Mary’s lap after His crucifixion, that strengthens Adolf’s faith and restores his inner peace:

Here, Koeppen directs the reader’s attention to Christ’s Spirit and His ultimate sacrifice for the sake of humanity. He indicates that love, mercy, and forgiveness are pillars of genuine Christianity and offers faith as a powerful antidote to his era’s existential crisis.

Reminded by this world-famous religious artifact of Christ’s exemplary benevolence, the young deacon comes to a pivotal decision: “Adolf wollte lieben, auch wenn er sich zur Liebe zwingen mußte, er wollte jedem Menschen freundlich und liebend begegnen, selbst den Eltern wollte er freundlich und liebend begegnen, selbst dem eigenen Vater . . .” (GW 2: 501). The narrator states:

Hier vor der zu Recht gepriesenen Pietà betete Adolf, er bat um Liebeskraft; kein weiteres Gebet sprach er in der Hauptkirche der Christenheit, und dann verließ er, . . . ein kleiner verwirrter, von allzuviel Pracht erschlagener Diakon, den Petersdom, dessen Luft und Anblick er nicht ertrug (GW 2: 501).

This scene is tremendously significant. With this passage, the author refers to postwar Germany’s intergenerational conflict and suggests to his contemporaries to treat every human being in a friendly and loving way. He concedes that it will be extremely difficult for the young generation to forgive the older generation for Germany’s fascism, World War II, and the Holocaust. Yet, he signals via the Pietà and Adolf’s conduct that love, mercy, and forgiveness are not only commendable virtues but also essential attributes of a genuine Christian.
A Christian approach to postwar Germany’s generation gap

Through the following dialogue between Adolf and Siegfried, the author illuminates postwar Germany’s intergenerational dispute from the perspective of the young generation. To be specific, he clarifies the conflict from the standpoint of a young nihilist and a young Christian who represent two very diverging approaches to the generation problem. The young composer and the young cleric sit in a gelateria and eat ice cream. Adolf is depressed. He just saw his father in the dungeon of Castel Sant’Angelo, where the callous Nazi shamelessly urinated into the vessel, in which many poor souls died. Yet, “von Gaumenlust erfrischt und in dieser Laube alles natürlicher empfindend, harmloser und leichter zu lösen,” Adolf overcomes his gloominess. He turns to Siegfried and suggests explaining to their parents why they think and live in a different way (GW 2: 515-16). Siegfried vehemently objects to this proposal: “Ich will mein Leben ja nicht rechtfertigen! Wie käme ich dazu mein Leben zu rechtfertigen? . . . (GW 2: 516). Strengthened in his faith, Adolf counters that one has always to justify one’s life “vor Gott, vor den Menschen, und warum nicht auch vor den Eltern” (GW 2: 516). Siegfried replies defiantly: “Ich lebe, wie ich will” (GW 2: 516). Yet, Adolf vetoes: “Mit gleichem Recht könnten auch unsere Eltern sagen, sie hätten ihr Leben gelebt, seien ihren Weg gegangen, es hätte ihnen Spaß gemacht” (GW 2: 516). Through the young cleric’s counter-argument, Koeppen reminds the reader that the Nazis and their supporters lived, like postwar Germany’s young generation, for what they perceived as right and good. Through Siegfried’s dismissal of Adolf’s moral objection, the author implies that not only the older generation lost sight of ethics but also Germany’s young nihilists. By
pointing out to Adolf that their parents were responsible for Germany’s fascism, the war, and the heartless murder of millions of people, the indignant protagonist rationalizes his unyielding disposition towards the older generation (GW 2: 517). He explains to his cousin that he fears that this raving nationalism will reemerge, whereupon Adolf urges him: “Versuche die Menschen zu ändern” (GW 2: 517). The cynical protagonist counters “Sie sind nicht zu ändern,” but Adolf’s plea has heightened his conscience (GW 2: 517). Thus, he asks himself, “war es nicht auch mein Gedanke, daß wir, die Söhne, die wir andere Lebensweisen wünschten, auch für sie kämpfen sollten; trotz allem Anschein der Aussichtslosigkeit?” (GW 2: 518). Even so, his cynicism and egoism gain the upper hand. (GW 2: 518). He ignores his ideals and concerns and merely wishes to enjoy his newly-gained liberties as long as they last (GW 2: 517). However, as can be deduced from Siegfried’s and Adolf’s conversation, the author finds fault with the detached and cynical stance of young postwar intellectuals who disbelieve in humanity’s ethical potential, ignore their concerns, and turn their back on society. He contrasts then the protagonist’s egotistical and morally unconcerned break with the older generation with Adolf’s Christian approach.

Unlike the unforgiving Siegfried, the young cleric adheres to his promise to treat every human being in a friendly and loving way and visits his mother. The scene stresses Eva’s national-socialist disposition that borders on insanity, which explains Adolf’s initial hesitation to have contact with her. As the narrator points out, the woman is blinded by the “erhabenen Traum vom Reich, von arischer Weltbeglückung und germanischem Herrentum” and perceives her own son as a traitor (GW 2: 523). With her spiteful abhorrence of her different-minded son, the author illuminates the
intergenerational dispute from the perspective of the older generation. She is appalled to see him “im weibischen Rock, reichsfeindlicher römischer Pfaffen” (GW 2: 523). Her comment is significant insofar as it reveals that the Catholic Church opposed the Hitler regime and tried to intervene on behalf of humanity. That is to say, Koeppen mitigates with Eva’s dictum his aforementioned criticism of the ecclesiastical institution to some degree. In any case, Eva despises her own flesh and blood: “Es gab keine Gemeinschaft mehr zwischen ihr und ihm, . . . er hatte sich ans Kreuz gekettet, an die ungermanische Lehre aus Judenland . . . ” (GW 2: 523). She asks him rudely what he wants and does not even offer him a chair. She rages and tells her son that it is a shame that his father did not blow up the papal fortress and hang the pope when he had the chance during the war.

Adolf is shocked but listens to her blasphemies and tries to calm his mother. For a while, he thinks that she is possessed by the devil. He feels the urge to leave but overcomes the impulse, because he feels pity for her: “Er fühlte, daß sie litt. Er spürte, daß sie in ihren Ideen brannte und die Hölle in sich trug. Es brauchte keines Teufels. Sie war ihr eigener Teufel, sie quälte Leib und Seele” (GW 2: 525). Of special importance here is that Adolf recognizes her anguish, feels mercy, and decides to stay, which reveals his Christian spirit.

Then, Judejahn unexpectedly walks into the room, sees his son in his priestly outfit, and reacts like Eva: “Es ist Verrat” (GW 2: 526). Once again, rather than taking flight, Adolf stays and prays for his parents the Lord’s Prayer. That is to say, he asks God not only for atonement of their sins but also for the strength to forgive his father and mother for the suffering that they brought upon him and others. When Eva and Judejahn go down to the lobby of the hotel to meet Anna and Friedrich Wilhelm Pfaffrath, Adolf
accompanies them, much to everyone’s surprise and discomfort: “Verlegen schauten sie weg. Er störte ihren Tag. Seine schwarze Gestalt war ein Menetekel in Belsazars Saal” (GW 2: 527). It is significant that the young cleric’s presence disturbs and embarrasses the older generation. That is to say, his Christianity stirs their stifled conscience and serves as an unwelcome warning. With the biblical allusion to King Belshazzar and the ominous writing on his wall, Koeppen emphasizes once again the Nazis’ arrogance, cruelty, and impiety and suggests that God has numbered the days of the Nazis’ reign, weighted them on the scales, and found them guilty.98 It is equally important that the author signals here to postwar Germany’s young generation that a Christian approach to the intergenerational conflict might shame the older generation into mending their unwholesome disposition.

Judgment Day

With the novel’s final narrative sequence, Koeppen directs attention to God’s Last Judgment and suggests to the older generation to admit their sins, to do penance, and to ask for atonement to save their souls. In this scene, Adolf sees his father for the last time. The inveterate former SS-general has just shot Ilse Kürenberg, a German Holocaust survivor, to carry through his Nazi ideology. Judejahn flees into a nearby museum where his son enjoys the day. Full of horror, Adolf sees his deranged father coming. The old Nazi suffers a stroke and collapses. Despite everything his father has done, Adolf is concerned and rushes over to help to him: “Der Vater war noch nicht tot, und da fiel Adolf das Wichtigste ein – es gab die Hölle es gab die Hölle es gab die Hölle. Und nun

98 For the story of King Belshazzar and the writing on the wall see Daniel 5:1-30.
war keine Sekunde zu verlieren” (GW 2: 579). As the quote reveals, the young deacon has mastered his spiritual crisis. Unfortunately, he is not an ordained priest, which means that he cannot absolve his father’s sins. Concerned about his father’s redemption, he hurries to a nearby church and asks a priest to perform his father’s last rites. When they return, Judejahn is in a deep coma. The priest kneels down and administers the final anointing and prays: “Durch diese Salbung und seine gütige Barmherzigkeit verzeihe dir der Herr, was du durch Sehen, Hören, Riechen, Schmecken und Berühren gesündigt hast” (GW 2: 579). He recommends him to God’s Grace and Adolf prays for his father’s soul.

It is up to the reader to decide whether the inveterate Nazi, and like-minded people for that matter, will be delivered from his sins. Most likely, a devout Catholic comes to the conclusion that the Nazi’s soul is saved. A Protestant reader certainly disclaims the Catholic Church’s absolution powers and concludes, based on the fact that Judejahn never showed any sign of remorse and asked at no time for forgiveness, that he will be condemned. Non-believers who judge the Nazi on ethical grounds will find him guilty of crimes against humanity. Nihilists might merely shrug their shoulders. But one thing is for sure, Judejahn, like many of Hitler’s followers, was never concerned about his soul. He did not hear “die Stimme Gottes” (GW 2: 429). He dismissed moral and spiritual concerns and took a pilgrimage to might (GW 2: 442). Yet, as the author suggested earlier in the novel, this journey led him away from God the Almighty to Hitler, the “weithin sichtbaren Gott der Macht” and “des Teufels auserwähltes Handwerk” (GW 2: 429). In this manner, Koeppen suggests to the older generation that it might be wise to repent for the sake of their souls and to escape eternal punishment for their sins.
Closing remarks

Thomas Richner argued in the 1980s that Koeppen is caught in an anthropocentric and egocentric concept of the world (35). He explained further that the author wants to make the leap into faith and plays with the idea of becoming a religious writer, but then “wird er fahnenflüchtig, weil er gegen alle Flaggen, auch die des Glaubens, Aversionen hat” (107). In Richner’s view, Koeppen is unable to recognize “das Absolute . . . , weil er weder glauben kann noch glauben will” (109). This certainly applies to the trilogy’s protagonists but not to the author.


In this context, the following passage from Der Tod in Rome is of particular relevance. Adolf attends the premiere of his cousin’s symphony and asks himself: “Was wollte Siegfried mit dieser Symphonie sagen? Was drückte er aus?” (GW 2: 538). He recognizes the symphony as one of God’s incomprehensive soliloquies and thinks that
“Siegfried war Dank zu sagen, weil er Gottes Unruhe offenbart hatte” (GW 2: 540). It is possible that Koeppen intended his last postwar novel to serve the same purpose.
Conclusion

As this dissertation has demonstrated, Wolfgang Koeppen revealed in his postwar novels, *Tauben im Gras*, *Das Treibhaus*, and *Der Tod in Rom* both a disconcerting inner and outer reality. He directed his reader’s attention to the older generation’s deep-rooted national-socialism and their unwillingness to accept guilt for Germany’s infamous past. He addressed the young generation’s paralyzing existential fears, despair, and nihilism and confronted his readership with unwanted truths about postwar Germany’s social, economical, political, cultural, moral, and spiritual defects. As Ulrich Greiner put it: “Das ist aber zuviel für die Deutschen: böse Kritik – und keine positive Aussage; Politik – und kein Heil. Und als Gratifikation nur eine Erzählkunst, die um keines Trostes willen auf Wahrheit verzichten wollte” (20).

Koeppen’s contemporaries objected to the postwar author’s unsettling description of his era’s deficiencies; his portrayal of dysfunctional, despairing, and even resigning protagonists; his presentation of history as a recurring cycle of human violence and suffering; and the absence of easily recognizable solutions. The majority of Koeppen’s critics acknowledged the author’s formalistic skills, but they took offense at the trilogy’s content and censured the author for his fatalistic outlook. Hans Schwab-Felisch complained that *Tauben im Gras* lacked substance and an uplifting outlook (38). Fritz René Allemann scolded that *Das Treibhaus* had nothing to do with the truth (62). Paul Hühnerfeld criticized that *Der Tod in Rom* lacked a positive perspective (71). Erich Franzén complained about the absence of a clear-cut perspective (67), and even Karl Korn, one of Koeppen’s early proponents, spoke of the author’s “Haß, Verachtung und
Ekel” (46). In short, critics and the vast majority of Koeppen researchers ascribed to the author a scornful, misanthropic, fatalistic, and resigned Weltanschauung. However, the findings of this study allow for a new assessment of the postwar German author’s mental disposition.

As this doctoral thesis has substantiated, Koeppen’s way of thinking and writing owes much to Pascal’s and Kierkegaard’s existential philosophy. After Germany’s defeat, Koeppen noticed with great concern that the majority of his contemporaries simply longed for the fulfillment of their immediate needs and desires, and that they went on with their lives with little or even no reflection about their past and present conduct. The postwar author was equally worried about the young generation’s existential crisis. Due to the Holocaust, World War II, the Cold War, the menace of the atom bomb, and West Germany’s re-burgeoning nationalism and militarism, many members of the young generation had lost confidence in humanity and yielded to despair, cynicism, and nihilism. Nothing seemed to be certain; nothing seemed to have meaning. After years of blind docility and conformity, skepticism was certainly the first step in the nation’s healing process, but Koeppen clearly perceived that doubting everything would lead to a deadlock. Thus, the author searched for sure ways and means to improve his contemporaries’ wanting state of mind and conduct. His intellectual quest led him to Pascal’s and Kierkegaard’s theocentric existential philosophy, and he walked in their footsteps to lead his contemporaries out of what he perceived as an emotional, mental, moral, and spiritual impasse. However, the connection between Koeppen’s, Pascal’s, and Kierkegaard’s ethical body of thought and writings has been largely overlooked, which
explains why researchers still attribute to the postwar author a cynical and fatalistic mentality.

In an interview with Ekkehart Rudolf, Koeppen abjured a cynical and nihilistic standpoint (49). The author’s protest is understandable. Cynics and nihilists belong to the Kierkegaardian sphere of heedless superficiality. They are developed aesthetes, but they merely adopt the stance of a detached outsider and content themselves with being noncommittal critical observers. As this dissertation has established, the postwar German author exemplified through his protagonists this morally questionable stance. In contrast, Koeppen positioned himself not only as a critical observer but also as an active moral agent. By the very act of writing and publishing his trilogy, Koeppen demonstrates to Germany’s cultural and intellectual elite that non-conformism, i.e., a critical stance towards the collective and commonly-accepted social rules and regulations, does not exclude an active engagement in society. To the contrary, he indicates in his postwar novels that ethical choices and actions are essential for one’s self-development and that social commitment is a means to overcome despair and nihilism. Thus, it is unfair to ascribe to Koeppen a cynical and nihilistic disposition. In addition, the author’s objectives – to describe ignorance in a way so that an unreflective person gains consciousness; to portray powerlessness in a way so that a person who formerly felt deprived of power becomes aware of his or her potential – were moral endeavors and provide further evidence for his faith in humanity’s ethical abilities and his social commitment.

Unfortunately, as Pascal once stated, the will has the tendency to deflect the mind from seeing what it does not want to see. In other words, Koeppen’s contemporaries
failed to see that the author’s bleak panorama of postwar society was intended to awaken and strengthen their moral conscience and possibly their spirituality. The author depicted various forms and degrees of dubious dispositions and lifestyles that spanned postwar society. This way, Koeppen hoped that his readers would recognize themselves within the mental and moral spectrum displayed in the novel, contemplate and become concerned with their own flaws, and act upon their newly gained insight. His critics rightfully disapproved of the protagonists’ resignation, cynicism, and nihilism. Unfamiliar with Pascal’s and Kierkegaard’s communication method that Koeppen emulated, they made the mistake of equating the protagonists’ questionable mindset with the author’s Weltanschauung, which was also a common faux pas among researchers. The critics’ moral indignation contains a highly ironic facet. Via his postwar novels, Koeppen had hoped to shake the young generation out of their cynicism, fatalism and despair, and he had encouraged them to overcome their resigned state and to recognize their ethical potential. Thus, it is amusing that Koeppen’s reviewers, all of whom belonged to postwar Germany’s young intelligentsia, objected to Koeppen’s supposedly misanthropic and fatalistic mentality.

And last but not least, both critics and Germanists failed to see that Koeppen offered faith as a possible remedy for his era’s despair and that his biblical allusions served as signposts and as potential correctives to postwar Germans’ misconceived or faux Christianity. It is particularly surprising that researchers failed to trace the author’s philosophical references and to analyze the trilogy’s philosophical strata. In any case, both the philosophical and the religious dimensions of Koeppen’s postwar novels most clearly reveal the author’s compassion for his contemporaries’ affliction, his
encouragement of the despairing young generation, and his social and spiritual engagement.


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