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Normality After Knowledge: A TNK Account of Contemporary Pathologies

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Keywords	Abstract
Normality, Theory of Non-Knowledge (TNK), Contradiction, Epistemic Closure	*This paper proposes a formal and non-normative account of normality grounded in the Theory of Non-Knowledge (TNK). Against statistical, psychological, moral, and epistemic conceptions, it is argued that normality is not a property of agents, beliefs, or systems, but a nullificatory stabilization of contradiction within language and practice. By treating contemporary domains—semantic paradoxes, spiritual discourse, mental disorders, non-orthodox physics, libidinal action, and social coordination—as manifestations of structurally unavoidable inconsistency, this study demonstrates that appeals to "normality" function as meta-negations that close action without resolving meaning. Normality, thus reconceived, is neither truth nor health, but a contingent operational threshold produced through nullification.*

1. Introduction

The concept of normality occupies a central yet profoundly unstable position in contemporary thought. It permeates psychology, epistemology, logic, physics, the philosophy of language, and everyday social interaction, frequently operating as an implicit criterion of legitimacy, rationality, or acceptability. Despite its ubiquity, normality is rarely subjected to rigorous conceptual scrutiny. Instead, it is commonly assumed to refer to statistical regularity, cognitive health, semantic coherence, or social conformity, depending on the disciplinary context. These meanings are not merely diverse; they are often mutually incompatible. What is considered normal within one domain—semantic inconsistency, quantum indeterminacy, libidinal irrationality, or spiritual belief—may be classified as pathological or deviant within another. This fragmentation suggests that normality is not a descriptive property of the world but a functional construct whose theoretical status remains insufficiently examined.

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Classical and contemporary philosophy have already problematized the apparent neutrality of normality. In the philosophy of medicine, Georges Canguilhem demonstrated that the normal is irreducibly normative rather than descriptive, inseparable from value judgments embedded in life practices (Canguilhem, 1991). In social theory, Michel Foucault showed that normality functions as an instrument of power, produced and enforced through institutional mechanisms rather than discovered as a natural fact (Foucault, 1975). These analyses undermine the idea that normality can serve as a stable epistemic foundation; instead, they reveal it as a historically contingent and operational category shaped by discursive, political, and pragmatic constraints.

The instability of normality becomes even more evident when examined through the lens of language and logic. Semantic paradoxes, such as those discussed by Saul Kripke (1975), along with later developments in paraconsistent and dialetheist logics (Priest, 2006), demonstrate that meaningful linguistic systems need not be globally consistent. In such contexts, inconsistency is not a sign of semantic failure but a structural feature of expressive adequacy. Consequently, the expectation that normal language must be free of contradiction is revealed as an unjustified idealization rather than a necessary condition for meaning.

A similar displacement of normality occurs in contemporary physics. Quantum mechanics, from its earliest formulations, abandoned classical notions of determinacy, locality, and intuitive coherence while remaining empirically successful. Concepts such as complementarity and indeterminacy, associated with Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg, institutionalized forms of theoretical “abnormality” as standard scientific practice. Here again, what would once have been regarded as epistemically pathological becomes functionally indispensable. Normality, in this domain, no longer coincides with intuitive intelligibility but with operational viability.

In psychology and theories of action, the notion of normality is further destabilized by the central role of non-rational motivation. From classical psychoanalysis to contemporary neuroscience, it has become increasingly evident that human action is not primarily governed by rational justification but by affective, libidinal, and pre-reflective forces (Freud, 1920; Damasio, 1994). Within this context, rational consistency appears not as the norm of action but as an exception. This insight is further developed within the Theory of Non-Knowledge (TNK), where arbitrariness and libidinal attraction are not treated as defects to be corrected but as fundamental drivers of action. As argued by Souza (2025a, 2025b), what mobilizes the subject is not justification but attraction without reasons—an operative arbitrariness that precedes and persists beyond all rationalization.

The TNK provides a formal framework capable of integrating these dispersed critiques of normality. Drawing on the classical skeptical insight expressed in Agrippa’s Trilemma, TNK assumes that any sufficiently complex knowledge system is structurally incapable of achieving ultimate justification. Knowledge is inevitably confronted with infinite regress, circularity, or arbitrary stopping points. Under such conditions, contradiction is not an anomaly but an

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unavoidable feature of epistemic closure. The nullification operator, central to TNK, does not resolve contradictions nor hierarchize truths. Instead, it functions as a meta-negation that suspends knowledge claims in their entirety, allowing action to proceed without epistemic justification (Souza, 2025a).

Within this framework, normality can no longer be understood as coherence, truth, rationality, or conformity. Rather, it emerges as the residual state produced when contradiction is locally neutralized in order to enable linguistic, social, or practical continuity. Normality is not what is correct, but what remains after nullification renders inconsistency operationally tolerable. It is, therefore, not an epistemic category but a functional one: a stabilizing effect within an irreducibly contradictory field of meanings.

The aim of this paper is to redefine normality along these lines—not as a property of agents, beliefs, or systems, but as a consequence of nullification within the Theory of Non-Knowledge (TNK). By doing so, it seeks to unify phenomena that are typically treated as unrelated—semantic paradoxes, mental disorders, spiritual entities, non-classical physical theories, and libidinally driven action—under a single formal perspective. The apparent crisis of normality in contemporary society is thus reinterpreted not as cultural or moral degeneration, but as the increasingly explicit manifestation of the structural conditions under which meaning, knowledge, and action remain possible.

2. Normality and Semantic Paradox

The expectation that normal language must be logically consistent has long functioned as an unexamined presupposition in both philosophy and common sense. Classical logic treats contradiction as a pathological condition, and semantic theories traditionally assume that meaningful discourse must be governed by determinate truth conditions. However, the persistence of semantic paradoxes reveals the fragility of this assumption. Sentences that generate self-reference, circularity, or truth-value indeterminacy do not merely occur at the margins of language; rather, they arise from the very expressive resources that make language capable of generality, negation, and semantic ascent. The liar paradox and its variants exemplify this phenomenon, demonstrating that inconsistency is not an external disturbance but an internal consequence of semantic closure.

The work of Saul Kripke (1975) marked a decisive shift in the understanding of semantic paradoxes by demonstrating that natural language semantics cannot be fully captured by classical bivalent models without either trivialization or the exclusion of meaningful sentences. Kripke's fixed-point approach does not eliminate paradoxical constructions but instead suspends their evaluation, allowing language to remain operational at the cost of global determinacy. Subsequent developments in paraconsistent and dialetheist logics further radicalized this insight by rejecting

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the principle that contradiction necessarily entails semantic collapse (Priest, 2006). What these approaches share is the recognition that semantic normality cannot be equated with consistency.

From the perspective of the TNK, semantic paradoxes expose the impossibility of grounding meaning in a contradiction-free system. Language is not abnormal because it generates paradoxes; rather, paradoxes reveal the true structure of linguistic normality as inherently unstable. The nullification operator formalizes the way natural language already functions in practice: paradoxical sentences are not resolved but rendered inert, bracketed, or ignored so that communication may continue. Normal semantic behavior thus consists not in eliminating contradiction, but in nullifying its disruptive force. Meaning persists not because inconsistency is absent, but because it is locally silenced.

This account undermines any attempt to define normality in semantic terms as coherence or logical harmony. Instead, normality appears as a pragmatic residue: what remains sayable and usable after the excess of contradiction has been neutralized. Semantic normality is therefore a procedural achievement rather than a logical property, aligning directly with TNK's broader rejection of epistemic foundations.

3. Normality, Libido, and Action

If semantic paradoxes destabilize the notion of normality at the level of meaning, theories of action destabilize it at the level of agency. Classical models of rational action presuppose that agents act on the basis of reasons, preferences, and justifications that can, at least in principle, be rendered explicit. Within this framework, normal action is equated with rational action, while deviations from rationality are treated as error, weakness, or pathology. However, both psychoanalytic theory and contemporary neuroscience demonstrate that this model systematically misrepresents how action is actually produced.

From the Freudian tradition onward, it has been argued that human behavior is fundamentally driven by libidinal forces that operate prior to and independently of rational deliberation (Freud, 1920). Desire does not follow justification; it precedes it. Rational explanations typically function retroactively, providing narratives that stabilize action after the fact. This insight is reinforced by neuroscientific research demonstrating that affective processes play a constitutive role in decision-making, often determining choices before conscious reasoning occurs (Damasio, 1994). Under these conditions, rational consistency cannot be regarded as the norm of action, but rather as an exceptional and fragile achievement.

Within the Theory of Non-Knowledge (TNK), this situation is not interpreted as a failure of rationality, but as evidence of the primacy of arbitrariness in action. As argued by Souza (2025b), action is mobilized by attraction without reasons—a libidinal orientation that does not require justification in order to be effective. Attempts to normalize action by subordinating it to rational

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criteria therefore misidentify the source of agency. What is labeled as irrational or abnormal is often simply action that resists post hoc rationalization.

Normality, in this context, emerges as a regulatory fiction that suppresses awareness of libidinal arbitrariness. Social and psychological norms function by nullifying the non-rational origins of action, rendering them invisible in favor of coherent narratives of choice and responsibility. The nullification operator provides a formal description of this process: it does not eliminate libidinal contradiction, but suspends its explicit acknowledgment so that coordinated action remains possible. Normal action is thus not rational action, but action whose irrational grounds have been successfully nullified.

4. Normality, Social Order, and Institutional Closure

At the social level, normality acquires its most explicit regulatory function. Social norms define what counts as acceptable behavior, belief, or expression, and deviations from these norms are subject to correction, exclusion, or pathologization. While such norms are often presented as reflections of shared values or rational consensus, social theory has consistently shown that they are produced and maintained through institutional mechanisms rather than epistemic justification. Normality, in this sense, is less a description of social reality than a technique for managing it.

The analysis of Michel Foucault demonstrates that modern societies increasingly rely on normalization as a mode of power, operating through statistical averages, behavioral expectations, and disciplinary practices (Foucault, 1975). What is deemed normal is not discovered but imposed, and the distinction between normality and pathology serves to stabilize social order rather than to track truth. Similarly, institutional theories of social reality show that norms persist because they are collectively recognized and enforced, not because they are grounded in independent reasons (Searle, 1995).

From a TNK perspective, social normality is best understood as a large-scale application of nullification. Societies are composed of irreducibly contradictory interests, values, and beliefs. Rather than resolving these contradictions, institutions selectively silence them, establishing thresholds beyond which conflict becomes visible and sanctionable. Normality marks the zone within which contradiction is tolerated without disruption. It is a condition of coordination, not of coherence.

This perspective explains both the stability and fragility of social norms. Because nullification never eliminates contradiction, social normality is inherently unstable and must be continuously reinforced. Periodic crises of normality—such as moral panics, cultural conflicts, and struggles over legitimacy—are not signs of social failure but structural consequences of the impossibility of final closure. Normality persists only as long as nullification remains effective.

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Taken together, these analyses demonstrate that normality cannot be grounded in logic, rationality, psychological health, or social consensus. In each domain, normality emerges as a functional residue produced by the suspension of contradiction rather than its resolution. The remaining sections extend this account to the domains of physics and spiritual discourse, showing that even in the natural sciences and metaphysical practices, normality operates as a nullificatory stabilization rather than an epistemic achievement.

5. Normality and Physics

The sciences are often invoked as the paradigmatic domain of normality, understood in terms of methodological rigor, empirical constraint, and rational coherence. Classical physics, in particular, long served as the implicit model for epistemic normality: deterministic laws, objective observation, and stable causal structures were taken to define what it means for knowledge to be both intelligible and reliable. However, the development of twentieth-century physics fundamentally disrupted this model. Rather than reinforcing intuitive notions of normality, modern physics institutionalized forms of theoretical disruption that would be considered pathological in other domains.

Quantum mechanics represents the most decisive break with classical expectations. The abandonment of determinism, the introduction of probabilistic laws, and the dependence of measurement outcomes on experimental contexts rendered classical intuitions not merely incomplete but systematically misleading. The principle of complementarity, associated with Niels Bohr, rejects the possibility of a single, unified description of physical reality, replacing it with mutually incompatible but operationally necessary perspectives (Bohr, 1958). Similarly, the uncertainty principle formulated by Werner Heisenberg demonstrates that indeterminacy is not merely a limitation of measurement but a structural feature of physical description (Heisenberg, 1958).

From the standpoint of the TNK, the significance of these developments lies not only in their empirical success but in their epistemic implications. Physics continues to function and advance despite the abandonment of classical coherence, intuitive intelligibility, and unified description. What is preserved is not normality in the traditional sense, but operability. Contradictory or mutually exclusive models coexist, not because they can be reconciled, but because their incompatibility is locally neutralized in practice. Theoretical contradictions are not resolved; they are bracketed.

More recent relational and interpretative approaches reinforce this conclusion. For example, relational quantum mechanics denies the existence of observer-independent states, redefining physical properties as relational rather than absolute (Rovelli, 1996). Such frameworks do not restore epistemic normality; they formalize its impossibility. Physics thus exemplifies a domain in

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which knowledge remains productive precisely because it relinquishes the demand for global consistency.

Within TNK, this situation is best understood as a large-scale application of nullification. Classical intuitions regarding space, time, causality, and objectivity are not definitively refuted; rather, they are suspended when they hinder empirical practice. Normality in physics is therefore not truth-preserving coherence, but the residual stability achieved when incompatible descriptions are rendered non-disruptive. The physical sciences do not challenge the TNK thesis but instead confirm it: even the most successful forms of knowledge operate through systematic nullification rather than epistemic closure.

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