

How normal is normal?

# Normality and Other Deviations

PAUL VERHAEGHE

What is normal and what is abnormal? And why are we so eager to make the distinction? In 'Madness and Civilization', his 1961 classic, Michel Foucault pointed to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as the start of the systematic study of madness. Thinking about humanity became a matter of thinking in terms of reason as opposed to psychiatric illness, creating an urge to label in an attempt to bring order to the unfathomable.

Psychologist Paul Verhaeghe reread Foucault's work in the light of the present day. We live in a time when, for example, if a 'confused' person features in news reports, a whole army of experts immediately stands ready with a psychological explanation that stresses how the person differs from what is regarded as 'normal'. Where does this fear of the abnormal and the irrational come from?

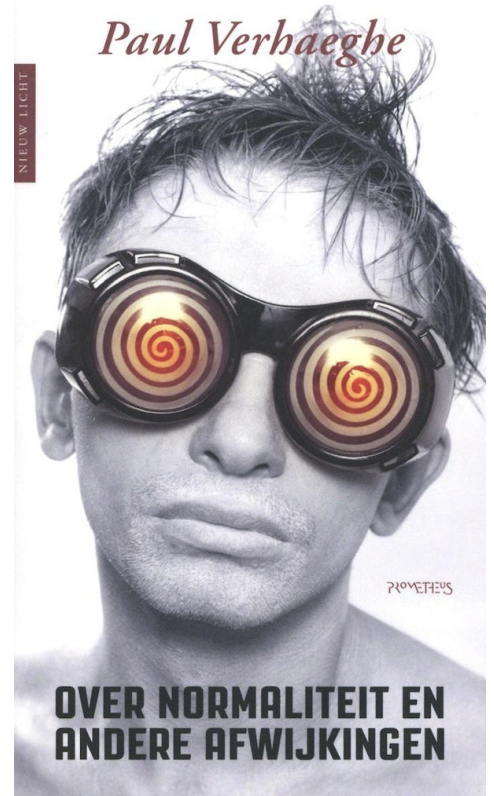
**As audacious as the title suggests. Verhaeghe provokes readers with intriguing philosophical ideas.**

TROUW

Verhaeghe believes that although psychiatry and psychology adopted a scientific stance in the twentieth century, much yet remains of the seventeenth-century approach to deviant behaviour. Diagnoses are still based on social norms and guesswork, and treatments and labels have a disciplinary effect, even though this is largely denied. Verhaeghe nevertheless recognizes the benefits of a social psychiatry that accepts the pursuit of structural social change as part of its task.

*Paul Verhaeghe*

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## AUTHOR



**Paul Verhaeghe** (b. 1955) is a clinical psychologist, psychoanalyst and a professor at the University of Ghent. With 'Between Hysteria and Woman' and 'On Normality and Other Aberrations' he achieved international recognition as an expert on Freud and Lacan. With *Love in Times of Loneliness* he reaches a broad audience, and has done that with his books ever since.

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