The Diminished Subject:

An Exploration into the *Aporia* of the Condition of the Possibility of Change as Represented in Twentieth Century Philosophy and Contemporary Literature

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Murdoch University, 2007.
Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

Signed: ______________________

Geoffrey David Bishop
Abstract

This thesis acts as an exploration of the notion of an *a priori aporia* of the always already diminished subject as opposed to an ideal self-present individual, and explores the efforts of a selection of twentieth century continental philosophy to address the crises of scepticism and metaphysics that beset this tradition and its search for the ‘truth’ of being. I will argue that my atemporal philosophical teleology proves in fact that any attempt to determine the finitude of subjectivity represents an ineluctable desire for metaphysical comfort that can, at times, verge on totalitarianism. Furthermore, the divergent temporal *loci* of these theorists — and their particular attempts to address these recurrent crises — necessarily calls into question the popular perception of a temporally specific ‘postmodern condition’ afflicting the contemporary subject.

Given the repeated failure of philosophical discourse to provide the subject with its *raison d’être*, a focus on the usefulness of literature in this regard becomes apparent within my theoretical schema, leading to a discussion of several controversial contemporary novels that parallel my proposition of the diminished subject, and refute negative perceptions of them as postmodern and valueless due to an apparent nihilistic ‘anything goes’ attitude. However, rather than resorting to naïve utopianism regarding the positive uses of literature, I argue that these texts reiterate the key theoretical propositions in this thesis with an awareness of the discursive nature of the subject and the *a priori* condition of the possibility of change which inevitably undermine transcendence. It is my proposition that these texts can be read as fictionalised expressions of the cathartic possibilities of literature, and an innate desire in all subjects for the metaphysics of comfort when faced with the meaninglessness of existence, something exacerbated by the recurrent failure of philosophical and religious discourses to counter the *aporia* of an always already absent self-presence of subjectivity.
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