

Brown University Department of Comparative Literature



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“Authority and Utility in Spinoza: From Epicureanism to Neoliberalism?”

Dimitris Vardoulakis is the deputy chair of Philosophy at Western Sydney University. He is the author of *The Doppelgänger: Literature's Philosophy* (2010), *Sovereignty and its Other: Toward the Dejustification of Violence* (2013), *Freedom from the Free Will: On Kafka's Laughter* (2016), and *Stasis Before the State: Nine Theses on Agonistic Democracy* (2018). He has also edited or co-edited numerous books, including *Spinoza Now* (2011) and *Spinoza's Authority* (2018). He is the director of “Thinking Out Loud: The Sydney Lectures in Philosophy and Society,” and the co-editor of the book series “Incitements” (Edinburgh University Press).

The paper argues that Spinoza is influenced by epicureanism. This is evident particularly in the conflict between authority—understood as the kind of figure that is impervious to argumentation—and the calculation of utility (*phronesis*) that is the precondition of action. This conflict is complex because in certain circumstances we may calculate that it is to our utility to allow a person in authority to calculate on our behalf.

The paper indicates, in addition, that the way Spinoza constructs the relation between authority and utility can inform our political predicament today. Spinoza may offer an alternative to populism as to why we have political figures who lack authority. And his thinking on utility could help us reconsider instrumentality in the neoliberal age.

**Thursday,
November 1st, 2018
5:30 pm**

**Maddock Alumni Center
Brian Room
38 Brown Street**

Free & open to the public.



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