In our forthcoming paper, ‘Omniscience, freedom and dependence’ (Fischer and Tognazzini, Forthcoming), we argued (among other things) that Jonathan Westphal’s (2011) critique of the basic argument for the incompatibility of God’s foreknowledge and human freedom (in the sense that requires freedom to do otherwise) is question-begging. We also presented a similar critique of arguments offered by other philosophers, including Storrs McCall (2011).

Westphal has recently responded (2012), arguing that we have completely missed the point of his original paper. We had focused on what we contend is a dialectical infelicity in Westphal’s argument; more specifically, we accused him of begging the question against the incompatibilist. Westphal contends in the new paper that we ignored his main point, which is a critique of a crucial premiss of the incompatibilist’s argument.1 He claims that his ‘solution’ to

1 Although Westphal himself claims to be offering a critique of the incompatibilist argument, one might instead interpret him as offering only a competing argument for compatibilism, which starts by presuming that Jones is free and that God knows what Jones will do, and then goes through the claim that God’s belief depends on Jones’s action to the conclusion that the two presumptions are not clearly inconsistent. (Thanks to an anonymous referee for this suggestion.) But as we point out in our original article (2012, section 5), at best this results in...
the problem of divine foreknowledge and human freedom is aimed at a version of the argument for incompatibilism that begins with a premiss stating that God’s belief (say, that Jones will mow the lawn at some subsequent time) is *logically or metaphysically necessary*. Westphal claims that the argument’s validity *requires* the necessity (in this sense) of the first premise, but that God’s belief is clearly *not* necessary (in this sense), since there are various possible worlds in which Jones fails to mow his lawn (whether freely or not), and in those worlds God does not believe that he will. After all, God’s belief is determined by or depends on what Jones does.

The argument that Westphal criticizes runs as follows, where ‘\(Bgf\)’ is the proposition that on Friday God believed some proposition, \(f\), about Jones’s mowing the lawn on Monday:

1. \(\Box Bgf\)
2. \(\Box(Bgp \supset p)\)
3. \(\Box f\)

Westphal’s favoured response to this argument, as he makes clear again in his new paper, is that premiss (1) is false, since God will fail to believe \(f\) in any world in which Jones does otherwise (and surely there are many of those). This response is fine as far as it goes, but the problem is that it is aimed at an argument that we did not defend, and, as far as we can tell, no one has defended. In any case, no one *should* defend a version of this argument in which the box operator in the first premiss is to be interpreted as logical or metaphysical necessity. \(Bgf\) is clearly contingent, depending, as it does, on the relevant (presumably contingent) human action in the future. Rather, we defended – and one ought to seek to evaluate – an argument in which God’s belief in the past is putatively ‘fixed’ or ‘power necessary’ or ‘accidentally necessary’. ‘Accidental necessity’ is the term Ockham employed to pick out a kind of temporally relative necessity: the necessity of those events or states of affairs that are ‘over-and-done-with’ in the past. (See the essays in Fischer 1989.) Of course, accidental necessity is compatible with logical and metaphysical contingency.

To show that premiss (1), as interpreted in terms of accidental necessity, is false, it would *not* suffice to point out that there are some possible worlds in which Jones fails to mow his lawn. There may well be, but that is consistent with its being the case that Jones does not have it *in his power* at the relevant time in the actual world to fail to mow his lawn. Westphal is correct about the argument he seeks to address; but he does not address the intended

a stalemate between compatibilist and incompatibilist, and thus the debate has not been advanced. And of course there is also the fact that Westphal has explicitly distanced himself from this strategy. In his most recent article, he says, ‘The argument I gave was not an argument for compatibility. It was an argument against an argument against compatibility.’
version of the incompatibilist’s argument (and, indeed, the one we discussed and the one typically put forward by the incompatibilist).

In his original article (2011: 249), Westphal claims that his critique of the version of the argument involving logical necessity also applies to versions involving weaker operators, such as Peter van Inwagen’s ‘Np’ (read as ‘p and no one has, or ever had, any choice about whether p’ (1983: 93)). Westphal thinks his critique also applies to these other versions because just as □Bgf is clearly false, so is NBgf. (Our original discussion of Wetsphal’s paper construed him as responding to these arguments with operators weaker than logical or metaphysical necessity, since those are the only plausible versions of the foreknowledge argument.) But our point, here and in our original reply, is precisely that a proposition like NBgf is not obviously false, and is certainly not shown to be false by appealing to the mere fact that God’s belief depends on what Jones does. After all, it is at least plausible that God’s belief in the past has the specific necessity that is associated with facts that are already over-and-done-with. When the foreknowledge argument is run with the proper sort of necessity in mind, Westphal’s point that God’s beliefs are conditional or dependent on the future is, though true, either irrelevant or question-begging.2

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2 Thanks very much to Patrick Todd, Jonathan Westphal and an anonymous referee.