ABSTRACT: Responsibility for belief creates a puzzle. On the one hand, we seem to be responsible for our beliefs in a distinctively epistemic way. This is suggested by the fact that we hold each other to account for the beliefs that we hold, the fact that we criticise other believers as ‘gullible’ or ‘biased’, and the fact we try to persuade others to revise their beliefs. On the other hand, responsibility for belief looks hard to understand because we seem to lack control over our beliefs, and control is plausibly necessary for responsibility. A popular way to deal with this puzzle is to appeal to the fact that belief is an attitude that is responsive to reasons, and to claim that this reasons-responsiveness is a form of control that suffices for responsibility.

In this talk, I will develop an objection to such reasons-responsiveness accounts, an objection which draws from parallel debates in legal philosophy about criminal negligence. I will argue that reasons-responsiveness accounts, while they provide a good explanation of how responsibility for belief is possible, do not provide a plausible account of which beliefs we are responsible for. Specifically, they don’t provide a plausible account of which unjustified or irrational beliefs we are responsible for and which we are not. This problem is analogous to one faced by the influential capacity-based account of responsibility for criminal negligence defended by H.L.A. Hart. This analogy, however, points towards a more promising account of responsibility of belief, if we draw on accounts of negligence that improve on Hart’s.