Agency and the Attitudes: Responsibility through Reasoning

Abstract

What makes us morally responsible for our beliefs and intentions? Since we do not exercise voluntary control over what we believe and intend, this question is as pressing for ethics as it is for the philosophy of action. I argue that responsibility for the attitudes is grounded in a thinker’s inferring to a conclusion. Inferring is a fully intentional yet non-voluntary exercise of rational agency. We are responsible for inferring in virtue of its normative grounding in our commitments and values. By working out our responsibility with regard to inferential transitions in the mind, we come to understand a prior dimension of our responsibility for our intentional bodily actions: namely, our answerability for the attitudes that prompt and sustain those actions.