

# Reason Claims and Contrastivism about Reasons\*

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In this paper I argue for contrastivism about reasons. Just as contrastivism about causation and knowledge hold that ‘cause’ and ‘knows’, respectively, express relations with argument places for sets of alternatives, contrastivism about reasons holds that ‘reason’ expresses a relation with an argument place for a set of alternatives.<sup>1</sup> Some consideration might be a reason for an action relative to one set of alternatives, but not a reason for it relative to another set.<sup>2</sup>

This thesis is compatible with two different ways of further developing contrastivism. First, we might adopt *shallow* contrastivism. This is the view that, though the relation expressed by ‘reason’ has an argument place for sets of alternatives, we can ultimately understand this relation in terms of an underlying, non-contrastive *favoring* relation that holds between considerations and actions (or attitudes), independently of any set of alternatives. On this view, ‘reason’ talk tracks not *whether* some consideration favors some action, but the degree to which it favors the action, compared to the degree to which it favors the other alternatives. On another view, *deep* contrastivism, the contrastive reason relation expressed by ‘reason’ is not analyzable in terms of a more fundamental non-contrastive favoring relation. It is worth making this distinction clear, because other contrastivists have not done so, and it bears on how radical a thesis contrastivism really is. Though I do think deep contrastivism is ultimately

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<sup>1</sup>On contrastivism about knowledge, see for example Schaffer (2005b); on contrastivism about causation, see for example Schaffer (2005a).

<sup>2</sup>In this paper I’ll be concerned with *pro tanto* or *contributory* reasons, rather than with what there is all things considered, or on balance, reason for an agent to do. As I think of the distinction, *pro tanto* reasons contribute to what there is all things considered reason to do.

preferable to shallow, this paper is not meant to establish this.<sup>3</sup>

First, I'll present an argument for contrastivism from Sinnott-Armstrong (2004, 2006, 2008). This argument begins from the observation that we often make reason ascriptions that explicitly employ 'rather than', which the contrastivist takes as a sort of model for all reason ascriptions. But I'll show that this argument is too fast: there's an easy response on behalf of the non-contrastivist. It's still worth discussing, however, because once we see why it fails, we will be in a position to give a stronger argument for contrastivism. After giving this argument, I'll develop a contrastive account of reason claims that explains the problem cases.

## 1 A Simple Argument

Sinnott-Armstrong (2004, 2006, 2008) points out that the following reason ascriptions are both intuitively true:

- (1) The fact that it's your birthday is a reason for me to bake you a chocolate cake rather than bake you no cake at all.
- (2) The fact that it's your birthday is not a reason for me to bake you a chocolate cake rather than bake you a lemon cake.

But this seems *prima facie* puzzling, if we think of reasons simply as considerations that favor some action. If the fact that it's your birthday is a reason for me to bake you a chocolate cake rather than bake you no cake at all, then it seems that it has to favor baking you a chocolate cake. But if it favors baking you a chocolate cake, why wouldn't it be a reason to bake you a chocolate cake rather than bake you a lemon cake? Sinnott-Armstrong concludes that reasons are always reasons for one thing *rather than* another: to know whether some fact is a reason for some action, we have to know 'Rather than what?'. That is, 'reason' expresses a relation with an argument place for an alternative, or set of alternatives, relative to which the consideration is a reason for the action. This easily explains how (1) and (2) could both be true: the 'rather than' clause makes explicit the alternative relative to which the fact that it's your birthday is or is not a reason for me to bake you a chocolate cake.

This argument for contrastivism, however, is too fast. First, contrastivism holds that *all* reasons are contrastive. But most reason ascriptions are not explicitly contrastive, unlike (1) and (2). So one way we may resist contrastivism, in the face of

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<sup>3</sup>See Snedegar (msb), as well as Ross (2006), Ch. 9 for arguments in favor of a contrastive favoring relation.

Sinnott-Armstrong’s observation, is to hold that ‘reason’ is ambiguous between a contrastive sense and a non-contrastive sense. The contrastive sense is used in claims like (1) and (2), while the non-contrastive sense is used in non-contrastive ascriptions, like ‘The fact that it’s your birthday is a reason to bake you a chocolate cake’.

I think this view is unattractive, because ‘reason’ fails a standard test for ambiguity, which Schaffer (2007) has called *coordination across conjunction*. ‘Reason’ fails this test for ambiguity because sentences like the following are perfectly appropriate:

- (3) The fact that you sprained your ankle is a reason to wear your brace, and to lift weights rather than run.

Notice that there is just one occurrence of ‘reason’ here; this suggests that ‘reason’ latches on to both conjuncts, ‘to wear your brace’ and ‘to lift weights rather than run’. The first conjunct, though, is non-contrastive, while the second is explicitly contrastive. If the single occurrence of ‘reason’ latches on to both conjuncts, that is evidence that ‘reason’ is univocal, whether it takes a contrastive or a non-contrastive complement. So sentences like (3) are a problem for the ambiguity view.<sup>4</sup>

Ruling out the ambiguity view, though, does not yet establish contrastivism. We can still try to offer non-contrastive analyses of explicitly contrastive reason ascriptions like (1) and (2). If we can analyze these sentences in terms of non-contrastive reasons, then they will not cause a problem for the non-contrastivist.

A tempting, but ultimately problematic, idea is to give an analysis in terms of the strength of reasons, like one of the following:

**RT-1:**  $r$  is a reason to  $A$  rather than  $B$  iff  $r$  is a stronger reason to  $A$  than it is to  $B$ .<sup>5</sup>

**RT-2:**  $r$  is a reason to  $A$  rather than  $B$  iff  $r$  is either (i) a stronger reason to  $A$  than it is to  $B$ , or (ii)  $r$  is a stronger reason not to  $B$  than it is not to  $A$ .<sup>6</sup>

Either of these analyses would let us explain how (1) and (2) could both be true without resorting to contrastivism. Since the fact that it’s your birthday is a stronger reason to bake you a chocolate cake than to bake you no cake at all, (1) is true, according to either analysis. But since this fact is an equally strong reason to bake you a chocolate cake and to bake you a lemon cake, (2) is also true, according to either analysis.

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<sup>4</sup>This argument is adapted from one in Schaffer (2007), p. 396. Schaffer argues first that ‘knows-*wh*’ ascriptions are contrastive, and uses this argument to help make the case that ‘knows that’ ascriptions are also contrastive, since we want a unified semantics for ‘knows’.

<sup>5</sup>Ben Lennertz, Shyam Nair, Mark Schroeder, and Evan Tiffany have all suggested this kind of analysis to me in conversation.

<sup>6</sup>An anonymous referee suggested this analysis.

While these analyses do seem natural, I think both face a serious problem. The problem is that they require the phrase ‘rather than’ to function very differently in reason ascriptions than it functions in other contexts. In ordinary uses of ‘rather than’ like, ‘I want pizza rather than salad’, ‘Bob went to the store rather than to the gym’, and ‘Two plus two equals four rather than five’, ‘rather than’ seems to mean something along the lines of ‘and not’, perhaps with an implicature that the two things being contrasted are somehow especially relevant.<sup>7</sup> But according to **RT-1** and **RT-2**, ‘rather than’, as used in reason ascriptions, does not mean anything like ‘and not’, so they seem to rely on an ad hoc treatment of ‘rather than’ in reason ascriptions. This is a serious cost for these proposals.

Some writers, in objecting to contrastivism about explanation and about knowledge, have given non-contrastivist analyses of explicitly contrastive claims on which ‘rather than’ does mean ‘and not’.<sup>8</sup> Consider the following two proposals, which adopt this strategy, and differ only in the scope of the ‘not’:

**RT-3:**  $r$  is a reason to  $A$  rather than  $B$  iff  $r$  is a reason to  $A$  and  $r$  is not a reason to  $B$ .

**RT-4:**  $r$  is a reason to  $A$  rather than  $B$  iff  $r$  is a reason to  $A$  and  $r$  is a reason not to  $B$ .

Either of these proposals lets us explain how (1) and (2) could both be true, without resorting to contrastivism. Since the fact that it’s your birthday is both a reason to bake you a chocolate cake and a reason to bake you a vanilla cake, (2) is true according to either proposal. And since this fact is not a reason to bake you no cake at all, and in fact a reason *not* to bake you no cake at all, (1) is also true according to either proposal.

Since there are reasonable, independently motivated non-contrastivist explanations of the data provided by (1) and (2), Sinnott-Armstrong is too quick in concluding on this basis that reasons are contrastive. What ascriptions like (1) and (2) do show, however, is that non-contrastivists need to say *something* about these explicitly contrastive

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<sup>7</sup>‘Rather than’ as used in preference ascriptions may seem to better fit with **RT-1** and **RT-2**: ‘I prefer cake rather than pie’ might seem to mean that I like cake more than I like pie. But I think a better analysis here is the following: I would choose cake and not choose pie, when those are the alternatives. In ordinary cases, I would make this choice because I like cake more than I like pie, but this need not be part of the analysis of the ‘rather than’ ascription.

<sup>8</sup>See Ruben (1987); Temple (1998) for this sort of strategy in resisting contrastivism about explanation. See Schaffer (2008) for arguments against this kind of analysis of ‘rather than’ knowledge ascriptions, and Rickless (fc) for further discussion.

ascriptions; I've argued in this section that they should take some version of the popular non-contrastivist strategy, treating 'rather than' as meaning 'and not'. But now that we've seen this, we're in a position to give a stronger argument for contrastivism.

## 2 A Stronger Argument

In this section I'll show that both **RT-3** and **RT-4** are problematic. This gives us good reason to reject non-contrastive accounts of reasons in favor of contrastivism. At the end of the section, I'll consider an objection to my argument, and argue that it fails.

### 2.1 The argument

Suppose that I need to get to campus sometime today, but live twenty miles away. Further, suppose I'm out of shape and don't want to wear myself out getting there. Now consider the following reason ascriptions:

- (3) The fact that campus is twenty miles away is a reason to drive to campus rather than bike there.
- (4) The fact that campus is twenty miles away is a reason to bike to campus rather than run there.

Both of these sentences are intuitively true, given the set-up of the case. But, as I'll now show, this causes problems for the non-contrastivist.

First, notice that it follows on both **RT-3** and **RT-4** that if ' $r$  is a reason for  $A$  rather than  $B$ ' is true, then  $r$  is a reason for  $A$ .<sup>9</sup> So on both proposed analyses, (5) follows from (4):

- (5) The fact that campus is twenty miles away is a reason to bike to campus.

Since (5) follows from (4) on both proposals, and since (4) is true, the non-contrastivist is committed to the truth of (5).

Now consider **RT-3**, which says that we should analyze ' $r$  is a reason to  $A$  rather than  $B$ ' as saying that  $r$  is a reason to  $A$  and  $r$  is not a reason to  $B$ . According to this view, (6) follows from (3):

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<sup>9</sup>This also plausibly follows on **RT-1**, since if  $r$  is a stronger reason for  $A$  than it is for  $B$ , it is surely a reason for  $A$ . As an anonymous referee points out, this does not follow on **RT-2**. But, as I argued in section 1, **RT-2** (as well as **RT-1**) relies on an idiosyncratic treatment of 'rather than' in reason ascriptions.

(6) The fact that campus is twenty miles away is not a reason to bike to campus.

The problem, of course, is that (5) and (6), both of which the non-contrastivist who adopts **RT-3** is committed to, are inconsistent. So this analysis of ‘rather than’ ascriptions fails.

Now consider **RT-4**, on which ‘ $r$  is a reason to  $A$  rather than  $B$ ’ means that  $r$  is a reason to  $A$  and  $r$  is a reason not to  $B$ . This view also leads to a problem, though not to an outright contradiction. For on that proposal, (7)—instead of (6)—follows from (3):

(7) The fact that campus is twenty miles away is a reason not to bike to campus.

The non-contrastivist who adopts **RT-4** is thus committed to both (5) and (7); that is, she is committed to saying that the fact that campus is twenty miles away is both a reason *to* bike to campus and a reason *not to* bike to campus. But this is an implausible result. So the second proposal, while not leading to an outright contradiction, does give us an implausible result.

## 2.2 Response: Denying Exclusivity

The non-contrastivist may question the implausibility of the result, that the fact that campus is twenty miles away is both a reason to bike there and a reason not to bike there. If this result isn’t really troubling, then the argument against **RT-4** is no good. So why think it is troubling?

One reason that many people will find this result implausible is that it violates the following principle:

**Exclusivity:** For all facts  $r$ , agents  $s$ , and actions  $A$ , if  $r$  is a reason for  $s$  to  $A$ , then it’s not the case that  $r$  is also a reason for  $s$  not to  $A$ .

Philosophers who seem to accept this principle include Nagel (1970); Raz (1999); Crisp (2000). If **Exclusivity** is true, then the argument I’ve given shows that none of the non-contrastivist analyses of ‘rather than’ ascriptions that I’ve considered so far could be correct.

But in fact there’s reason to question **Exclusivity**. Jonathan Dancy has argued that the principle is false by appealing to cases like the following.<sup>10</sup> Suppose I love to talk to pretty girls, but hate to be snubbed. And suppose that, unfortunately, pretty girls are likely to snub guys like me. Then the fact that the girl across the bar is so

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<sup>10</sup>See Dancy (1993), p. 62 for discussion.

pretty is a reason for me to go talk to her, since I love to talk to pretty girls. But it's also a reason for me not to go talk to her, since I hate to be snubbed, and since pretty girls are likely to snub guys like me. If this is the right way to describe this case (and I think it is), then **Exclusivity** is false.

Further, common theories of reasons seem committed to the falsity of **Exclusivity**. On a simple desire-based theory of reasons, for example, when you have a desire that *A*-ing would help promote, and *r* explains why this is so, *r* is a reason to *A*.<sup>11</sup> So if you have *two* desires, such that *r* explains both why *A*-ing would promote one of them and why not *A*-ing would promote the other, this kind of theory entails that *r* is both a reason for you to *A* and a reason for you not to *A*. Similarly, on a standard value-based theory, all we need is a case in which there are two values such that *r* explains both why *A*-ing would promote or respect one of them and why not *A*-ing would promote or respect the other.<sup>12</sup>

This lets us see where **Exclusivity** goes wrong. It is common ground between desire-based and value-based theories that our reasons for action are provided or explained by various objectives—desires, on the desire-based theory and values on the value-based theory (and perhaps both on a hybrid theory). When a fact *r* helps explain why my *A*-ing would promote or respect one of these objectives, *r* is a reason for me to *A*, which is provided by that objective.<sup>13</sup> The problem with **Exclusivity** is that on most theories, there are multiple objectives that can provide reasons—agents have multiple desires, and several kinds of values are worth promoting or respecting. In the pretty girl case above, for example, I have two relevant desires: first, a desire to talk to pretty girls, and second, a desire not to be snubbed. The first desire explains why the fact that she's so pretty is a reason to go talk to her: this fact explains why doing so would promote my desire to talk to pretty girls. Similarly, this same fact explains why not going to talk to her would promote my desire to not be snubbed. It is easy to construct a similar case in which multiple values, rather than multiple desires, are involved.

What this shows is that popular theories of reasons allow for different objectives to explain why one and the same fact can be a reason to *A* and not to *A*. But they

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<sup>11</sup>See Schroeder (2007), for example.

<sup>12</sup>See Parfit (2011); Scanlon (1998); Moore (1912), for example.

<sup>13</sup>For discussion of objectives providing reasons, see Moore (1912) (though he talked about rightness rather than reasons); Nagel (1970); Anderson (1993); Scanlon (1998); Finlay (2001, 2006); Schroeder (2007); Wedgwood (2009); Parfit (2011). For analyses of reasons in terms of explanation, see Toulmin (1950); Finlay (2001, 2006); Searle (2001); Broome (2004); Schroeder (2007). In Snedegar (msa), I discuss this idea further and argue that the idea that (at least many) reasons involve the promotion of certain kinds of objectives itself provides independent support for contrastivism.

do not allow for one and the same objective to explain why one and the same fact is both a reason to do and not to do one and the same action. That's because one fact  $r$  can't explain both (i) why  $A$ -ing would promote or respect an objective  $o$ , and (ii) why not  $A$ -ing would also promote or respect  $o$ .<sup>14</sup> So the following weaker principle is very plausibly true, even if **Exclusivity** is false:

**Restricted Exclusivity:** For all facts  $r$ , agents  $s$ , actions  $A$ , and objectives  $o$ ,  $o$  cannot explain both why  $r$  is a reason for  $s$  to  $A$  and why  $r$  is a reason for  $s$  not to  $A$ .

What this principle rules out is that one and the same objective can explain why one and the same fact is both a reason to  $A$  and a reason not to  $A$ . This is overwhelmingly plausible. The cases that seem to violate **Exclusivity**, like the pretty girl case above, do not violate this principle. And, as I argued above, popular theories of reasons, though they allow for violations of **Exclusivity**, do not allow for violations of **Restricted Exclusivity**.

Crucially, this principle is enough for my argument, because the joint truth of (5) and (7) *does* violate **Restricted Exclusivity**. The objective that provides, or explains, both of them is my desire not to wear myself out getting to campus. This explains both why the fact that campus is twenty miles away is a reason to drive rather than bike, and why this fact is a reason to bike rather than run. And since these 'rather than' ascriptions, according to the non-contrastivist who adopts **RT-4**, are to be analyzed partly in terms of the non-contrastive reasons mentioned in (5) and (7), this single desire also provides the reasons ascribed in both (5) and (7). Thus, **RT-4** leads to an implausible violation of **Restricted Exclusivity**.

### 3 Contrastivism

In this section I'll develop a contrastivist account of reasons, and then use that account to explain the problematic case from the last section.

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<sup>14</sup>To illustrate this, consider Schroeder (2007)'s Hypotheticalism. He holds that  $r$  is a reason for  $s$  to  $A$  iff  $r$  explains why  $A$ -ing would promote  $p$ , where  $p$  is the object of one of  $s$ 's desires, and where promoting  $p$  is just making  $p$  more probable. But it would be strange to think that  $r$  could explain both why  $A$ -ing would make  $p$  more probable, and why not  $A$ -ing would also make  $p$  more probable. Similarly, it doesn't seem that one fact could explain both why  $A$ -ing would respect, say, the demands of justice, and why not  $A$ -ing would also respect the demands of justice.

### 3.1 A contrastive account reason claims

Contrastivism differs from traditional non-contrastive theories by claiming that the reason relation includes an argument place for sets of alternatives. So the relation holds between (at least) (i) some fact  $r$  which is the reason, (ii) the particular alternative  $A$  which the fact is said to be a reason for, and (iii) the relevant set of alternatives *out of which*  $r$  is said to be a reason for  $A$ .<sup>15</sup>

In an explicit ‘rather than’ ascription like ‘The fact that today is your birthday is a reason to bake you a chocolate cake rather than not baking you a cake’, the alternatives are provided explicitly: {bake you a chocolate cake, don’t bake you a cake}.<sup>16</sup> These kinds of ascriptions, according to contrastivism, provide the model for all reason ascriptions. But most reason ascriptions aren’t like this; most are what I’ll call ‘bare ascriptions’, like ‘The fact that it’s your birthday is a reason to bake you a chocolate cake’. Since the relation that serves as the semantic value of reason ascriptions—say,  $R(r, A, Q)$ —has an argument place for a set of alternatives  $Q$ , this set must be provided somehow before we can evaluate the ascription. The most natural way to develop the theory, and the way I’ll adopt, is to let the set of alternatives be provided by the context of utterance.<sup>17</sup> In a context in which a reason ascription is made, some particular set will be relevant. One straightforward way in which a set of alternatives might count as the relevant one is by including the options under discussion, though there are likely other ways.<sup>18</sup>

Since an explicit ‘rather than’ ascription gives the set of alternatives explicitly, these ascriptions will have a stable content across contexts (assuming there are no other context-sensitive terms). But since bare ascriptions have the set of alternatives provided by context, their content will be shifty across contexts. Here are the semantic principles I propose:

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<sup>15</sup>I’m ignoring agents here.

<sup>16</sup>The set of alternatives might be larger than just two members, but since I’ve been dealing with ‘rather than’ ascriptions here, I’ll mostly limit my discussion to two-member sets.

<sup>17</sup>We might develop a theory on which it’s provided instead by the context of assessment, or perhaps by some features of the agent’s situation (though to count as a contrastivist theory, it should not always simply be the set of alternatives which it is possible for the agent to perform). Sinnott-Armstrong (2004, 2006) defends a view on which there’s no saying which set is relevant for evaluating any particular bare reason ascription, which leads him to adopt Pyrrhonian skepticism, and thus to refuse to evaluate any bare ascription as either true or false.

<sup>18</sup>One common contrastivist idea is that intonational stress can help fix the set of alternatives. If I say ‘You have a reason to buy some *milk*’, that suggests a set of alternatives like {buy milk, buy juice}, whereas if I say ‘You have a reason to *buy* some milk’, that suggests a set of alternatives like {buy milk, steal milk}. See Rooth (1992); Dretske (1970); Schaffer (2005b, 2008) for discussion of stress and the role of alternatives.

**Explicit Ascriptions:** ‘ $r$  is a reason to  $\phi$  rather than  $\psi$ ’ is true in context  $c$ <sup>19</sup> iff  $r$  is a reason to  $\phi$  out of  $\{\phi, \psi\}$ .

**Bare Ascriptions:** ‘ $r$  is a reason to  $\phi$ ’ is true in context  $c$  iff  $r$  is a reason to  $\phi$  out of  $Q$ , where  $Q$  is the relevant set of alternatives in  $c$ .

**Bare Against Ascriptions:** ‘ $r$  is a reason not to  $\phi$ ’ is true in context  $c$  iff  $r$  is a reason not to  $\phi$  out of  $Q$ , where  $Q$  is the relevant set of alternatives in  $c$ .<sup>20</sup>

Now I’ll show how to use this account to explain the problematic case from the last section.

### 3.2 A contrastive solution

One way to think about the problem facing the non-contrastivist is that, no matter what analysis of ‘rather than’ ascriptions we considered, we always derived that  $r$  is a reason to  $A$  from ‘ $r$  is a reason to  $A$  rather than  $B$ ’.<sup>21</sup> This result, when combined with claims about  $B$  that we could also derive (and that are independently plausible anyway) led either to outright contradiction or to otherwise implausible results. So the culprit seems to be this inference:

**RT:** If  $r$  is a reason to  $A$  rather than  $B$ , then  $r$  is a reason to  $A$ .

The trouble is that this inference seems very hard to reject for the non-contrastivist.

The contrastivist, on the other hand, can not only reject this inference, but can explain why it seems so natural. Note first that **RT** is, of course, a non-contrastivist principle—there is no mention of contrasts on the right-hand side. So I suggest that we replace it with this:

**CRT:** If  $r$  is a reason to  $A$  rather than  $B$ , then  $r$  is a reason to  $A$  out of  $\{A, B\}$  and  $r$  is a reason not to  $B$  out of  $\{A, B\}$ .

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<sup>19</sup>Note that ‘in context  $c$ ’ doesn’t show up on the right-hand side of the biconditional. That’s because, as I said, explicit ascriptions are not context-sensitive.

<sup>20</sup>If we can think of reasons against an option  $A$  simply as reason for  $\neg A$ , then this clause is just a special case of **Bare Ascriptions**. I agree that this is an attractive view, though things are slightly more complicated for the contrastivist, since  $\neg A$  will not necessarily be in the same set of alternatives as  $A$ —sets of alternatives need not be *exhaustive* in this sense. And it’s not clear how to make sense of a reason to  $\neg A$  out of a set of alternatives that doesn’t contain  $\neg A$ . But going into more detail about this here would be distracting. See Snedegar (msa). Further, some philosophers have recently given accounts on which reasons against  $A$  cannot simply be thought of as reasons for  $\neg A$ . See Greenspan (2005), for example.

<sup>21</sup>Again, **RT-2** does not validate this inference, which is an advantage of that proposal. But it does rely on a problematic treatment of ‘rather than’ in reason ascriptions.

The second half of the consequent is perhaps less obvious than the first, but I think it is nevertheless very compelling. Given that  $A$  and  $B$  are mutually exclusive (why else would we use ‘rather than’?),  $B$ -ing precludes  $A$ -ing. So if  $r$  is a reason to  $A$  out of  $\{A, B\}$ , it is very plausible that it’s also a reason not to  $B$  out of this set.<sup>22</sup>

Importantly, given **Bare Ascriptions**, we can now see why **RT** seems so natural: it’s because the default interpretation of the consequent expresses a truth. The antecedent, ‘ $r$  is a reason to  $A$  rather than  $B$ ’, makes salient the set of alternatives  $\{A, B\}$ . And according to **Bare Ascriptions**, when we interpret the consequent, ‘ $r$  is a reason to  $A$ ’ relative to this set, it means that  $r$  is a reason to  $A$  out of  $\{A, B\}$ . Finally, according to **CRT**, this will be true as long as ‘ $r$  is a reason to  $A$  rather than  $B$ ’—the antecedent of **RT**—is true.

The mistake, though, is to move from the truth of ‘ $r$  is a reason to  $A$ ’ in the context set up by the antecedent of **RT** to the truth of this claim in *every* context. If the relevant set of alternatives is not the one provided by the antecedent,  $\{A, B\}$ , then we have no guarantee that ‘ $r$  is a reason to  $A$ ’ will be true, relative to this new set.

This puts us in a position to see how the contrastivist can solve the puzzle. First, here are the relevant sentences, re-written to make the contrasts explicit.

- (3\*) The fact that campus is twenty miles away is a reason to drive rather than bike (out of  $\{\text{drive, bike}\}$ ).
- (4\*) The fact that campus is twenty miles away is a reason to bike rather than run (out of  $\{\text{bike, run}\}$ ).
- (5\*) The fact that campus is twenty miles away is a reason to bike (out of  $\{\text{bike, run}\}$ ).
- (7\*) The fact that campus is twenty miles away is a reason not to bike (out of  $\{\text{drive, bike}\}$ ).

The truth of the ‘rather than’ claim (3), along with **CRT**, tells us that (7) is true in a context in which the relevant set of alternatives is  $\{\text{drive, bike}\}$ , so we interpret (7) as (7\*), above. But in this context, by **Bare Ascriptions**, (5) would be true only if the fact that campus is twenty miles away is a reason to bike relative to this same set:

- (5’) The fact that campus is twenty miles away is a reason to bike out of  $\{\text{drive, bike}\}$ .

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<sup>22</sup>This shows that my view does respect the fact that ‘rather than’ means something like ‘and not’: relative to the set of alternatives  $\{A, B\}$ , when ‘ $r$  is a reason to  $A$  rather than  $B$ ’ is true,  $r$  is a reason to  $A$  and a reason *not* to  $B$ .

But this is false. So in the context in which (7) is true, (5) is false.

The truth of the ‘rather than’ claim (4), along with **CRT**, tells us that (5) is true in a context in which the relevant set of alternatives is {bike, run}, so we interpret (5) as (5\*) above. But in this context, by **Bare Against Ascriptions**, (7) would be true only if the fact that campus is twenty miles away is a reason not to bike relative to this same set:

(7’) The fact that campus is twenty miles away is a reason not to bike out of {bike, run}.

But this is false. So in the context in which (5) is true, (7) is false.

Thus, there’s no one context in which both (5) and (7) are true—at least not one in which both reasons are provided by my desire not to wear myself out getting to campus.<sup>23</sup> It’s true, of course, that (3) and (4) are true in the same contexts, but that’s not puzzling—no one should deny that these ‘rather than’ claims can be jointly true. The key to the contrastivist solution is, essentially, treating all reason ascriptions as (at least implicitly) ‘rather than’ ascriptions—as relative to sets of alternatives.

## 4 Conclusion

In this paper, I’ve argued that ‘reason’ expresses a relation which has an argument place for a set of alternatives. As I pointed out in the introduction, for all I’ve said here, there may still be a non-contrastive, underlying favoring relation, in terms of which we can analyze the contrastive reason relation. Though I think that there are good arguments against this view, that is an issue for another occasion.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>What is the status of **Restricted Exclusivity**? It’s a non-contrastivist principle, so I need to reject it. But I relied on it in my argument against the non-contrastivist. I claim that the non-contrastivist is committed to this principle, which is why the case I presented in section 2 is problematic for her. The contrastivist should replace **Restricted Exclusivity** with a contrastive version, which says that one and the same objective can’t explain why one and the same fact is a reason to do and not to do one and the same action *relative to* one and the same set of alternatives.

<sup>24</sup>See Snedegar (msb) and Ross (2006), Ch. 9.

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