Contrastivism about Reasons and Ought

Abstract

Contrastivism about some concept says that the concept is relativized to sets of alternatives. Relative to some alternatives, the concept may apply, but relative to others, it may not. This article explores contrastivism about the central normative concepts of reasons and ought. Contrastivism about reasons says that a consideration may be a reason for an action *A* rather than one alternative, *B*, but may not be a reason for *A* rather than some other alternative, *C*. Likewise, contrastivism about ought says that it might be that you ought to perform action *A* rather than action *B*, while it is not the case that you ought to perform *A* rather than some other alternative, *C*. It explores the shape and motivations for, and the relationship between, these contrastivist theories.

Nearly everyone accepts that in ethics, and normative philosophy more generally, alternatives matter. Whether what you did was wrong, or was what you ought to have done, or whether you even had any reason to do it, depends on what the alternatives were. Suppose you run into the burning building, scoop up Tiny Tim, and carry him out to safety. Is this what you ought to have done? Maybe so. But what if an alternative, one that you could have just as easily performed, was to run in, scoop up both Tiny Tim and Tiny Tom—who was right next to Tiny Tim—and carry both of them to safety? If this was an alternative, what you did was not what you ought to have done. If this was not an alternative, what you did may well have been what you ought to have done. So the claim that alternatives matter is uncontroversial, in the following sense: the *availability* of certain alternatives can affect the normative status of an action.

The focus of this article is on a much stronger and much more controversial sense of the claim that alternatives matter. *Contrastivism* about normative concepts (specifically, ought or reasons) says that the normative status of an action can vary with the particular alternatives to which we are comparing the action.[1] According to contrastivism about ought, even holding fixed the available alternatives, whether you ought to perform some action can still vary with the particular comparison we are making. For example, even if driving, taking the bus, and biking are all available alternatives, it may be that you ought to take the bus, when compared with driving, but not when compared with biking. Similarly, according to contrastivism about reasons, whether some consideration is a reason for you to perform an action can vary with the

comparison. It may be that the fact that decreasing fuel consumption is good for the environment is a reason to take the bus when compared with driving, but not when compared with biking. These examples may sound uncontroversial. The controversial contrastivist claim is that all reasons, and all oughts, are relativized to sets of alternatives.

This article is an overview of contrastivism about reasons and ought. It describes the shape of the theories, as well as discussing motivations and challenges. Finally, it investigates the relationship between the contrastivism about reasons and contrastivism about ought.

1 Contrastivism

First I will describe contrastivism about reasons and ought at a general level. In the following two sections, I will present some arguments for contrastivism.

Contrastivism about some concept says that the concept is relativized to sets of mutually exclusive, but not necessarily jointly exhaustive, alternatives. A common contrastivist claim is that the target concept is *question-relative*. This is to appeal to the conception of questions as partitions over parts of logical space, or equivalently, as sets of alternatives.[2] Relative to one question, the concept may apply, while relative to another, it may not apply.

Contrastivism about reasons and ought can be thought of in this way. In the case of reasons and ought, the questions are what we will call *normative questions*, or question of *what to do*.[3] The alternatives in the set are mutually exclusive options (at least in deliberative, as opposed to evaluative, cases), which need not include every possible option, and not even every option open to the agent.[4] Relative to some normative questions, it may be true either that you ought to *A* or that some consideration is a reason for you to *A*, but relative to others it may be false. When you ought to *A* relative to a normative question, *A* is the *answer* to the question of what to do. When some consideration is a reason to *A* relative to a normative question, that consideration *bears on the question*, and in particular supports *A* as the answer.[5]

Sometimes the normative question will be provided explicitly. For example, if I ask, "So, should we go to the Dining Room, the One Under, or Maisha for dinner?", and you reply, "We ought to go to the Dining Room", your claim will be most naturally interpreted relative to the normative question consisting of the options I mentioned. On a natural contextualist version of contrastivism, the normative question relative to which ought and reason ascriptions are

interpreted will be provided by the context, if it's not provided explicitly. In any deliberative or evaluative context (at least ones in which we are discussing what someone ought to do, what ought to be the case, or what reasons someone has), some options will be relevant, and they will constitute the normative question.

This appeal to a contextually relevant deliberative question is not *ad hoc*. Linguists and philosophers of language have given independent arguments that our theory of communication needs to appeal to a contextually salient *question under discussion* to properly interpret much of our discourse. For example, to interpret prosodic focus (e.g., intonational stress), it is standard in linguistics to appeal to the question under discussion. Similarly, we can use the question under discussion to help explain the notion of a *relevant* conversational contribution, as one that addresses the question under discussion.[6] In normative contexts, this question is a normative question that consists of options. The crucial linguistic claim the contrastivist makes, then, is that reason and ought ascriptions are interpreted relative to this question and that as this question varies, what you have reason to do or what you ought to do may likewise vary.

This brings out an important distinction between two kinds of contrastivist theses. We may accept contrastivism merely as a *linguistic* thesis, about (some) claims involving the word 'reason' or the word 'ought'. This is the thesis that these claims are to be interpreted relative to a set of alternatives, and are only true or false once a set is supplied. Or we may accept a deeper contrastivist thesis, that the concepts of a reason and of ought themselves are relativized to sets of alternatives. That is, the concepts only apply or fail to apply to some action and agent relative to a set of alternatives, or normative question. In principle we could accept only one of these theses—e.g., we may think only that 'reason' and 'ought' should get a contrastive semantic treatment, though the important normative concepts themselves are fundamentally non-contrastive. In this article, I will primarily have in mind the deeper, conceptual thesis. But some of the arguments I discuss will most directly support the linguistic thesis; I will simply assume that these arguments provide at least indirect support for the conceptual thesis, since a reasonable default picture is one on which we use the words 'reason and 'ought' to talk about reasons and what agents ought to do. More generally, at times I will have to be a bit sloppy with this distinction, and assume that linguistic points have bearing on the conceptual theses.

So far I have focused on the contrastivist claim that reasons and oughts are relativized to

sets of alternatives, or questions, that may not include every option open to the agent—that the sets are non-exhaustive. But there is a second important feature. The options in the set must be individuated at some level of detail; they may be individuated in a more or less fine-grained way. For example, one normative question may be {stay home, go out} while a more fine-grained one is {stay home and cook, stay home and read, go to the store, go to the gym}. The contrastivist holds that, just as reasons and oughts are relativized to sets that can differ in which options they include, the sets can also vary in how those options are individuated.[7]

1.1 Contrastivism about ought

Contrastivism about reasons and ought is the thesis that that these concepts are question- or alternative-relative. This structural thesis leaves a lot of latitude in giving a substantive theory of reasons and ought. Here is perhaps the simplest contrastive theory of ought.

> Contrastive Ought: Agent S ought to perform action A relative to normative question Q iff A is the best alternative in Q.

This lets us see very clearly why it may be that S ought to A relative to one question but not relative to another. This can happen as long as A is the best alternative in the first but not in the second. So, on this simple picture, ought inherits its contrastive character from the contrastive, or comparative, character of *best*—to be best is clearly to be best out of some set of alternatives.[8]

The idea here is that there is a contrast-invariant ranking of alternatives, and any particular ought will be relativized to a subset of those alternatives. But the alternatives will retain their relative ranking in the subset. A more extreme version of contrastivism would do away with the contrast-invariant ranking, and allow the ranking itself to vary with the particular alternatives. For example, we may say that relative to {A, B, C}, A is ranked above B, but relative to {A, B, D}, B is ranked above A. But this would be a radical view which would, among other things, require us to deny a version of the principle of the independence of irrelevant alternatives. Further, the arguments that contrastivists have used to motivate their theories do not support this more extreme version of contrastivism.

But given that the version of contrastivism in Contrastive Ought is relatively moderate, the contrastivist should articulate advantages of contrastivism over a more standard, non-contrastive semantics for 'ought', as developed by Kratzer (1981), and other writers following her (here is one place where I am being sloppy with the linguistic/conceptual distinction). According to this view, to simplify a bit, 'ought' is relativized to (i) a modal base—i.e., a set of worlds that corresponds to the relevant information in the context, and (ii) an ordering source, which delivers a ranking of those worlds. 'You ought to *A*' then means that the highest-ranked worlds are ones in which you *A*. The question, then, is whether the advantages of contrastivism can simply be mirrored by the standard semantics by, for example, restricting the modal base so that only the alternatives the contrastivist would put into the normative question are taken to be available.

Some contrastivists have offered variations on the simple picture. For example, Cariani (2013) allows for cases in which you ought to *A* out of Q, even though *A* is not itself a member of Q. What is required (among other conditions) is that *A* is *visible* to Q, where *A* is visible to Q when *A* perfectly partitions the alternatives that are in Q. That is, each alternative in Q is one in which the agent *A*s or one in which the agent does not *A*—there is no alternative such that the agent can perform it either by *A*-ing or by not *A*-ing. This allows Cariani to appeal to fewer shifts in the set of alternatives in interpreting 'ought' claims, and especially in explaining inferences between 'ought' claims. This gives Cariani an advantage over the standard Kratzerian account, because he is able to get by with fewer context shifts, which allows him to more easily allow for inferences between 'ought' claims. Some inferences that the Kratzerian would have to treat as strictly speaking equivocal, because the 'ought' claims are relativized to different modal bases, Cariani can treat as perfectly legitimate. But Dowell and Bronfman (forthcoming) have recently objected to Cariani's account—and in particular the features of that account that give it these advantages—in favor of a more orthodox Kratzerian account.

1.2 Contrastivism about reasons

Just as in the case of ought, accepting contrastivism about reasons leaves room for various more or less substantive theories of reasons. We may follow reasons primitivists like Scanlon (1998), Parfit (2011), and Dancy (2004) and hold that all we can really say to elucidate the notion of a

reason is that reasons count in favor of the things they are reasons for. Here is a contrastivist version of reasons primitivism:

> Contrastive Reasons Primitivism: Consideration *r* is a reason for agent *S* to perform action *A* relative to normative question Q iff *r* favors *S*'s *A*-ing relative to Q.

If the contrastivist follows reasons primitivists and identifies the reason relation with the favoring relation, and holds that there isn't more to say, this is the view she ends up with.

One problem with this theory is that it leaves us without an explanation of certain relationships between reasons relativized to different sets of alternatives. For example, if *r* is a reason for *A* relative to Q, then it seems that *r* should also be a reason for *A* relative to a subset of Q that contains *A*. But, as far as Contrastive Reasons Primitivism goes, we just have two different sets, Q and Q′, which happens to be a subset of Q. Since the favoring relation is contrast-relative, we have no reason to think there will be any particular relationship between reasons relativized to these different sets.[9]

Contrastivism is also compatible with a non-primitivist view, according to which we can usefully analyze the concept of a reason. Here is a more substantive view, which analyzes reasons in terms of the notions of explanation, promotion or respect, and objectives:

> Contrastive Reasons Substantive: Consideration *r* is a reason for agent *S* to perform action *A* iff *r* explains why *S*'s *A*-ing better promotes or respects some objective *O* than any other alternative in Q.

Different theorists will have different views about what the objectives are, the promotion or respect of which explains our reasons. They may be the objects of desires of the agent, objective values like justice or goodness, or something else.

We can weaken this theory by changing 'better' to 'at least as well as', or by changing 'any other alternative' to 'at least one alternative'. Different choices here will give different verdicts in particular cases, as well as have important implications about the relationships

between reasons relative to different sets—e.g., whether a reason to *A* out of Q is also a reason to *A* out of a subset of Q that contains *A*. If we adopt the strong version of the theory in Contrastive Reasons Substantive, we will secure this entailment. If we adopt the weakest version, that *A*-ing only has to promote or respect *O* more than *some* other alternative in Q, we will not secure this entailment, since the subset of Q may not include the alternatives that promote or respect *O* less well than *A*.[10]

Now that we have seen the shape of contrastive theories of reasons and ought, we are ready to see some arguments for these theories.

2 Contrastive Reason Ascriptions

One straightforward argument for both contrastivism about reasons and contrastivism about ought is that it best explains certain patterns of acceptable ascriptions of those concepts.[11] In particular, contrastivism can easily make sense of *explicitly contrastive* ascriptions. In this section I will focus on contrastive ascriptions of reasons, but similar arguments can be used to motivate contrastivism about ought. (Again, I am assuming that arguments showing that reason *ascriptions* are contrastive provides at least indirect support to the deeper, conceptual thesis, and not only the linguistic thesis.) Consider the following pair of ascriptions:

(1) The fact that the book is due back today is a reason for you to take it back to the library rather than leave it on the shelf.

(2) The fact that the book is due back today is not a reason for you to take it back to the library rather than send it to the library with me.

The acceptability of (1) and (2) at least *prima facie* show that whether the fact that the book is due back today is a reason for you to take it back to the library can vary with the comparison being made. Since this is exactly what contrastivism about reasons claims, the contrastivist can explain the acceptability of (1) and (2) easily. The non-contrastivist, though, holds that whether some consideration is a reason for an action cannot vary with the particular comparison being made. So the acceptability of (1) and (2) present a puzzle for the non-contrastivist.[12]

To resist this argument, non-contrastivists have to provide analyses of explicitly contrastive ascriptions like (1) and (2) which do not require contrastive reasons. For example, the non-contrastivist may offer the following analysis:

NCR: *r* is a reason to *A* rather than *B* iff *r* is a stronger reason for *A* than for *B*

The reasons referred to on the right side of NCR are non-contrastive. Moreover, this seems to offer a reasonable interpretation of (1) and (2).

One problem for this non-contrastive approach is linguistic: this proposal does not give a particularly plausible interpretation of the phrase, 'rather than'. NCR interprets 'rather than' as meaning 'stronger than'. But this is not what 'rather than' means in other uses. Consider, 'We'll go to Los Angeles rather than San Francisco', 'We need a mathematician rather than a philosopher', and 'Two plus two equals four rather than five'. In all of these uses, the 'rather than' clause should be understood just as making explicit the particular comparison being made, just as the contrastivist says. None of these claims is plausibly understood as involving a hidden 'stronger than'.[13]

This problem gets more serious if the non-contrastivist extends this maneuver to contrastive ascriptions of 'ought', like 'You ought to take the bus rather than drive your SUV'. This is because these claims are not plausibly understood as involving 'stronger than' in any way, since ought, unlike reasons, does not have strength or weight. It is an *overall*, rather than contributory or *pro tanto*, concept.[14]

So the non-contrastivist who proposes an analysis like NCR is committed to an *ad hoc* interpretation of 'rather than' in reason ascriptions. Considerations of compositionality tell against this: in general, we should not assign the same expression different meanings in different linguistic contexts.

The contrastivist claims that the failure of initially plausible non-contrastive analyses of contrastive ascriptions shows that we should take claims like (1) and (2) at face value, and adopt a contrastive view of reasons. The non-contrastivist, on the other hand, can try to come up with other non-contrastive analyses. There are also general concerns about the cogency of arguments to radical conclusions about the structure of normative concepts that are based on ordinary usage of the terms that express those concepts. We might, for example, just think that our ordinary talk about reasons is sloppy in various ways, and does not really illuminate the true structure of the

concept, as the contrastivist holds.

3 Arguments from the Puzzles of Deontic Reasoning

In this section, we will see some arguments for contrastivism about ought that are based on the theory's ability to solve puzzles that have plagued theories of deontic reasoning.

Deontic reasoning, for our purposes, is reasoning with ought. As deontic logicians and moral philosophers have known for a long time, deontic reasoning faces a range of puzzles.[15] Contrastivists about ought have shown how contrastivism can be applied to solve these puzzles. Here I will discuss just one.

To appreciate the puzzles, and the contrastivist solutions, we need to see where the puzzles come from. As it turns out, many of them can be traced back to the same initially plausible inference rule:

Inheritance: If you ought to do *A*, and doing *A* entails doing *B*, then you ought to do *B*.

This rule is confirmed by lots of ordinary deontic reasoning, and is also validated by the standard semantics and logic of ought. But as is well known, Inheritance lies at the center of many puzzles of deontic reasoning.[16]

A representative puzzle comes from Jackson (1985). Imagine the following dialogue taking place:

(A) Lucretia ought to use less painful poisons against her enemies.

(B) Lucretia ought to use painless poison against her enemies.

(C) Lucretia ought to use political means rather than poison to achieve her goals.

(D) Lucretia ought to give up those goals and instead devote her time to helping the needy.

Each of these claims seems true, at least when initially uttered. But note that if Inheritance is a good principle of deontic reasoning, they cannot all be true. For example, the truth of (C) implies

that Lucretia does not use poison. This implies, via Inheritance (and the overwhelmingly plausible assumption that this is not a case of a moral dilemma) that both (A) and (B) are false. So the puzzle is to explain how each of these could be true, at least when initially uttered.

There are various ways a non-contrastivist may try to do this. But the contrastivist can reject Inheritance, and do so in a principled way. According to contrastivism about ought, oughts are relativized to potentially non-exhaustive sets of mutually exclusive alternatives. On the simple contrastivist picture that Jackson (1985) develops—essentially, Contrastive Ought, from above—to say that you ought to A out of a set Q is to say that A is the best alternative in Q.[17] If some alternative B is not even in Q, then it makes no sense to say that you ought to B out of Q— B cannot be the best alternative in Q if it is not in Q at all.[18] Thus, if it ought to be that A out of Q, and A entails B, then it cannot be true that it ought to be that B out of Q. So the only way we could make an Inheritance-style inference, on a contrastivist theory, is to shift the set of alternatives between the premises and the conclusion. But this looks more like equivocation than good reasoning.

Once we reject Inheritance, the puzzle presented by (A)–(D) dissolves—or at least, there is no obstacle to the joint truth of these claims. Moreover, the contrastivist can also explain why all of these claims seem true, when initially uttered. Each is relativized to a different set of alternatives. Since the set of alternatives to which ought is relativized to need not be exhaustive, different oughts can be relativized to sets that include different options. For example, on the reading on which it is true, (A) is plausibly relativized to a set like {Lucretia uses less painful poisons, Lucretia uses more painful poisons}. For (B), we plausibly have {Lucretia uses painful poisons, Lucretia uses painless poisons}.

This is a satisfying explanation of what is going on in the dialogue. In some sense, later claims seem to change the subject.[19] It would be reasonable, for example, for the utterer of (A) to reply to (B), "Oh, sure. I wasn't considering that as an option", rather than to take there to be any kind of genuine disagreement. This is further confirmation for the contrastivist thesis that ought is relative to some set of alternatives that need not include all the possible options.

Arguments that what agents ought to do can vary not only with what options are included in the set but also with how those options are individuated are similar. They focus on cases in which a more fine-grained ought, like 'You ought to mail the letter', is true while a more coarse-

grained one, like 'You ought to mail the letter or burn it', is false.[20] If Inheritance were true, the first claim would clearly entail the second, since mailing the letter entails mailing or burning it. But since the contrastivist can reject this principle, she can avoid puzzles like this.

A very important issue facing contrastivists who reject Inheritance is that they then owe us explanations of all of the unobjectionable inferences that this principle supports.[21] As we have seen, the most straightforward contrastivist theory rejects Inheritance, because any inference it supports must rely on a shift in the set of alternatives—if A entails B, then A and B cannot be in the same set of alternatives, since they are not mutually exclusive. The diagnosis of the puzzle cases is that they rely on an illicit shift like this, and so are equivocal. But even good inferences that Inheritance supports will have to rely on a shift, and so would seem to be equally equivocal.[22]

4 A General Normative Contrastivism?

We have seen how to motivate and develop both contrastivism about reasons and contrastivism about ought. A very plausible claim is that what an agent ought to do depends in some way on her reasons. In particular, some version of the following principle is widely accepted:

Ought Most Reason: Agent S ought to perform action A iff S has more reason for A than for any other alternative.

So there is plausibly a very tight connection between the concept of a reason and the concept ought.

This observation makes it very natural to ask: what is the relationship between contrastivism about reasons and contrastivism about ought? In particular, does adopting one force us, or at least put rational pressure on us, to adopt contrastivism about the other? For example, we might contrastivize Ought Most Reason as follows:

Contrastive OMR: S ought to A out of Q iff S has most reason to A out of Q

This is a relatively small departure from the non-contrastive Ought Most Reason, and incorporates both contrastivism about reasons and contrastivism about ought.

In some ways this kind of general normative contrastivism (that is, contrastivism about both reasons and ought) is theoretically attractive. In a deliberative context, for example, the deliberating agent would be faced with a deliberative question—a set of alternatives—out of which she must decide what she ought to do. This deliberation will involve considering her reasons for and against options in the set. And it will conclude in a judgment about what she ought to do, out of that set. Since we are cognitively limited agents, it is very plausible that most of our deliberation involves consideration of just a subset of all the possible options open to us, and at some more or less coarse-grained resolution. So, since reasons and ought are central concepts for deliberation, a general normative (or at least deliberative) contrastivism is broadly attractive.[23]

Nevertheless, we can instead choose to adopt contrastivism about only one concept, reasons or ought, but not the other. For example, we may pair a contrastive account of ought with a non-contrastive account of reasons as follows. As before, ought is relativized to a set of alternatives, and the alternative you ought to perform out of a set is the alternative which ranks highest in that set. This ranking of alternatives is provided, on this picture, by the reasons for and against each alternative. Crucially, these reasons are non-contrastive. Just as the simple contrastive theory, Contrastive Ought, appealed to a contrast-invariant betterness ranking, we can appeal to a contrast-invariant ranking based on non-contrastive reasons. One kind of motivation for this picture is the attractiveness of the idea that reasons are provided by general normative principles, perhaps something like Ross's (1930) *prima facie* duties, which are not sensitive to the specific comparisons we are making in a situation, though ought does inherit the contrastive or comparative character of 'best', or 'most'.

We could also adopt a contrastive theory of reasons without adopting a contrastive theory of ought, as follows. We accept some version of contrastivism about reasons, presented above. So we can accommodate the apparent contrast-sensitivity of reasons-talk (as well as other arguments for contrastivism about reasons). Moreover, we can allow a tight connection between your reasons and what you ought to do, as in Ought Most Reason. The twist is that when it comes to determining what you ought to do, we are only concerned with your reasons relative to

some *privileged* set of alternatives—perhaps the set of all the options open to you, partitioned in a way such that all morally (or epistemically, or prudentially, etc.) distinctions are respected. So what you ought to do—non-contrastively—is what you have most reason to do relative to this privileged set.

Both of these mixed theories are reasonable. Thus, though there is some broad theoretical attraction to a general normative contrastivism, it is not forced on us by accepting contrastivism about one concept or the other.

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1   I will follow the literature and use 'ought' (without quotes) to talk about the concept expressed by the word 'ought', e.g., "Contrastivism holds that ought is contrastive".

2   See Hamblin (1958) and Higginbotham (1996) for this conception of questions. See Schaffer (2007) for the connection between contrastivism about knowledge and questions.

3   In his recent defense of a contrastive theory of 'ought', Cariani (2013) calls these *deliberative* questions. But I want to reserve 'deliberative question' for a special kind of normative question, to be contrasted with *evaluative* questions, which will also count as normative questions.

4   For the most part I will treat options as actions. But to make sense of purely evaluative uses of 'ought', e.g., 'There ought to be world peace', we may need to treat the alternatives in the set as propositions. We can then unify the theory by treating an action as, roughly speaking, the proposition that the agent performs the action. Compare Cariani (2013) and Finlay and Snedegar (2014).

5   Compare Hieronymi (2005) on reasons as considerations that bear on a question. Let me emphasize that the alternatives in the set—the potential answers to the normative question—are options, not claims about what you ought to do; i.e., {go to the store, go to the gym}, not {I ought to go to the store, I ought to go to the gym}.

6   In the linguistics literature, see Rooth (1992) and Roberts (2012); see also Schaffer (2005b, 2008) and Finlay and Snedegar (2014).

7   See Cariani (2013). This is Yalcin's (2011) notion of *resolution-sensitivity*.

8   Compare Sloman (1970) and Finlay (2009, 2014).

9   One way to avoid this problem would be to hold that the favoring relation is non-contrastive, and analyze the reasons relation in terms of *degrees* of favoring, in a way that mirrors what I'll say below about Contrastive Reasons Substantive. This would not be a version of reasons primitivism, since we would analyze the contrastive reason relation in terms of a distinct non-contrastive favoring relation.

10   See Snedegar (2014a).

11   This is a popular style of argument for contrastivism about a whole range of concepts. See, for example, van Fraassen (1980) (explanation), Schaffer (2005b, 2007, 2008) (knowledge), Schaffer (2005a) (causation), Blaauw (2012) (belief), and Sinnott-Armstrong (2012) (free will).

12   See Sinnott-Armstrong (2006), Chapter 5, for lots of examples like (1) and (2), deployed in defense of contrastivism about reasons.

13   Compare the arguments in Schaffer (2008). See also Snedegar (2013) for more discussion of non-contrastive analyses of reason ascriptions like (1) and (2).

14   Some oughts, e.g., moral oughts, may be more important than others, e.g., oughts of etiquette. But these differences are not relevant for these kinds of cases.

15   Unfortunately, I do not have the space here to give relevant work in deontic logic the discussion it deserves. For an accessible overview, see McNamara (2008). For some brief remarks on the relationship between contrastivism and some work in deontic logic, see Snedegar (2014b). I am using 'deontic reasoning' as opposed to 'deontic logic' because I am more concerned with ordinary inferences we make using 'ought', as opposed to formal logical systems, even though those systems are very plausibly attempts to formalize our ordinary deontic reasoning.

16   There is much more precise and detailed discussion of this principle in deontic logic. For some recent work, see Goble (2009) and Hansson (2013).

17   See also Sloman (1970) and Snedegar (2012, 2014b).

18   As we saw above, Cariani (2013) rejects this constraint. He thinks it can be true that you ought to *A* relative to Q, even if *A* is not in Q. This is legitimate on his theory because he does not accept the simple view that what you ought to do relative to a set of alternatives is just the best alternative in the set—his account is more sophisticated.

19   That this is a good way to describe what's going on provides at least weak confirmation for contrastivism, since (i) contrastivism says the 'ought' claims are relativized to sets of alternatives, thought of as the contextually salient normative question, and (ii) the conversational concept of a topic is nicely understood in terms of such a question under discussion. See Roberts (2012).

20   This example is adapted from Ross (1941).

21   Not all applications of contrastive ideas require us to reject Inheritance. See, for example, Horty (2001), Cariani, Kaufmann, and Kaufmann (2013), MacFarlane (2014), Wedgwood (manuscript), and Cariani (forthcoming). All of these approaches have in common the implementation of a decision problem, or set of options, in the semantics of 'ought'. This puts these theories within the contrastivist camp. Exploring the motivations and challenges of these decision-theoretic approaches is essential for a full treatment of contrastivism about ought, but I do not have the space to do that here.

22   For two different contrastivist attempts to solve this problem, see Cariani (2013) and Snedegar (2014b).

23   See Sinnott-Armstrong (2008) for an argument that contrastivism about reasons is the best explanation of the contrastive quality of several other concepts that are intimately related to reasons, including **ought**, knowledge, and explanation.