# Cambridge Elements

**Elements Proposal**

**Elements Information**

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**Proposed Title of Element: Knowledge-First: A Functionalist Approach**
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**Brief Author Bio (Why are you writing this Element? What are your credentials?):**

I am Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Cogito Epistemology Research Centre at the University of Glasgow. I work mainly in epistemology, and at the intersection of epistemology with philosophy of language and ethics. I am the author of two monographs that defend knowledge-first accounts of epistemic justification and the normativity of constative speech: '*Shifty Speech and Independent Thought: Epistemic Normativity in Context*' (Oxford University Press) and '*Sharing Knowledge: A Functionalist Account of Assertion'* (with C. Kelp, Cambridge University Press). I have more than sixty articles and book chapters published in internationally leading journals, such as *Noûs, Philosophy and Phenomenological Research,* and *The Journal of Philosophy,* and in anthologies of prestigious publishing houses such as OUP and CUP. In several articles, I criticise extant knowledge-first accounts and I propose novel knowledge-first views of epistemic normativity, assertion, justification, closure and warrant transmission, testimony, group belief, disagreement, evidence, trust, and disinformation.

I am also the winner of the Young Epistemologist Prize 2021 for my paper 'Resistance to Evidence and the Duty to Believe', defending a knowledge-first account of evidence and defeat.
I am currently putting the finishing touches on a new book entitled '*Resistance to Evidence'*, for Cambridge University Press. The book investigates the epistemology and social psychology of evidence resistance, develops a taxonomy of triggers and normative statuses of evidence resistance, and puts forth a full knowledge-first account of the epistemic impermissibility of resisting evidence, the aim of neatly distinguishing it from justified evidence rejection.

I am currently running two large research projects, for which I have secured funding of more than $3 million from the most prestigious funders in the world, including a major research grant for my project entitled 'KnowledgeLab: Knowledge-First Social Epistemology' from the European Research Council (2021-2026); Before this, I was awarded several prestigious research fellowships, including from the Mind Association (UK) for developing a knowledge-first framework for epistemic normativity.

I am Associate Editor at *Philosophical Studies*, area editor for epistemology at *Ergo,* and I sit on the Editorial Board of the *Philosophical Quarterly.* I also sit on the Executive Committee of the Aristotelian Society, the Management Committee of the British Society for Theory of Knowledge, the Advisory Committee of the Institute of Philosophy at the University of London, and the Steering Committee of the Social Epistemology Network. I am Fellow and Board Member of the Young Academy of Europe and of the Royal Society of Edinburgh Young Academy of Scotland.

**Your Element**

Please give us some information below about your proposed Element, going into as much detail as you can.

**Abstract:**

Knowledge-first epistemology analyses epistemic normative properties in terms of knowledge. In more than 20 years since Timothy Williamson's seminal work, putting forth the first defence of a full knowledge-first epistemological framework, the knowledge-first research programme has generated an impressive amount of high-quality work, and very promising results across epistemological subfields (e.g. epistemic justification, defeat, evidence, epistemic normativity, social epistemology, know how, the nature and normativity of inquiry) and also at the intersection of epistemology with philosophy of language (e.g. the nature of speech acts, contextualism), mind (e.g. the nature of mental states) and moral and political philosophy (e.g. blame, trust, responsibility, political discourse).

Against this backdrop, this book zooms in on what I take to be the core normative claims of the knowledge-first programme: that knowledge is the central epistemic value, and that thereby central normative notions in epistemology – such as e.g. justification - are to be analysed in terms of knowledge. **The book offers a critique of extant knowledge-first accounts, and a defence of a novel, functionalist knowledge-first picture of the source and nature of epistemic normativity, in conjunction with corresponding accounts of justification and evidence**.

**Outline of contents:**

The book will be divided into five short and punchy sections (of about 5000-6000 words each).

**Chapter §1: Knowledge-First Theories of Epistemic Normativity: Motivations**

I first trace and critique several of the general theoretical motivations that have been offered for putting knowledge first in a general theory of epistemic normativity. I argue that extant inductive and abductive rationales to put knowledge first are not strong enough to do all of the work we want done: they offer solid support for the claim that we have good enough all-things-considered reason to investigate the credentials of the hypothesis that epistemic normative categories should be analysed in terms of knowledge, but limited epistemic support for the stronger claim, i.e. that this hypothesis is correct. I then propose an alternative, deductive route to this aim: I argue, on minimal functionalist grounds, that our representational systems are successful if and only if they deliver knowledge, and that this entails that epistemic normative categories are properly analysed in terms of knowledge.

**Chapter §2: Knowledge-First Epistemic Normativity: A Critical Overview**

In this chapter I examine extant direct knowledge-first theories of epistemic normativity and their standing objections. These views are direct knowledge-first views in that, on these theories, epistemologically relevant actions and mental states are governed by knowledge norms. Extant objections to these views are largely (albeit not exclusively), concerned with the extensional adequacy of these theories. However, extensional adequacy is just one theoretical virtue among many: one could think, then, that if direct knowledge-first theories excel along other dimensions of theoretical adequacy, we have reasons to either distrust the extensional data, or search for a suitable error theory. In contrast

to extant objections, I offer theoretical worries - having to do with prior plausibility and normative generalisability – against direct knowledge-first views of epistemic normativity.


**Chapter §3: Knowledge-First Functionalism**

I defend a naturalistically friendly, indirect knowledge-first epistemic normative picture according to which epistemic normative constraints drop out of the knowledge-generating function of our cognitive system. On the account I favour, generating knowledge is the etiological function of our cognitive system: tokens of our cognitive system type have generated knowledge in our ancestors, which has benefitted and kept them alive, which explains the continuous existence of the cognitive system type. This view, although knowledge-first, sheds light both on the nature and on the value of knowledge: knowledge occurs iff our cognitive processes fulfil their functions, and the value of knowledge consists in its contribution to the continuous existence of our cognitive systems. Also, in contrast to its extant knowledge-first competition, it also does so without requiring further theoretical commitments – to e.g. the non-analysability of knowledge, or to knowledge being a mental state in its own right. In this, it wins the day on prior plausibility.
Furthermore, I show how the account deals in a unified way with the epistemic normativity of belief, practical and theoretical reasoning, and constative speech. I argue that my indirect knowledge-first view of epistemic normativity brings to the table all the advantages of the direct knowledge-first framework, and none of the theoretical downsides.


**Chapter §4: Justification and the Knowledge Function**

This chapter argues against the two main direct knowledge-first accounts of epistemic justification – according to which justified belief is knowledge, or would-be knowledge - and defends an indirect, knowledge-first functionalist account of the epistemic justification. On this view, in a nutshell, a belief is justified just in case it is generated by a cognitive capacity that has the etiological function of generating knowledge. I show how this view is superior to competing accounts in that it accommodates all extensional data that need to be accommodated, and I outline its theoretical benefits.


**Chapter §5 Evidence and Being in a Position to Know**

This chapter argues that the main knowledge-first account of evidence on the market – according to which one's evidence is one's knowledge – suffers from an important worry having to do with licensing problematic evidence resistance. I then defend my preferred account, on which one's evidence consists in evidential probability raising facts that one is in a position to know, or what I dub 'knowledge indicators.' These facts are knowledge indicators in in that they enhance closeness to knowledge. I show that this view has the resources to account for the epistemic impermissibility of evidence resistance for both belief and credence, and that it delivers straightforward accounts of the nature of defeat and of norms of evidence gathering.


**Distinctive features/ perspectives (selling points):**

The book promises to make a novel and timely contribution to the literature. The audience for this volume would primarily be academics and research students working in philosophy. It would also serve as a valuable research resource for students at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels who work on related areas within Philosophy (e.g., epistemology, ethics general normativity theory, philosophy of mind and language).

While the book introduces readers to key ideas within the knowledge-first approach, it also, it should be emphasised, criticises some of its fundamentals – and in doing so, offers a new substantive version

of the view (functionalist knowledge-first); in this way, the project stands on its own as an independent theoretical option on the market.

Given the centrality of knowledge-first approaches to contemporary philosophical debate in several sub-fields of epistemology, as well as its importance for a number of other areas of analytic philosophy, it is anticipated that this monograph will prove very popular anywhere where analytic philosophy is prominent – i.e., particularly in the North American, European, and Australasian markets.

**In text materials required?   Please give details (tables/ graphs/ photographs/ line drawings/other):**

| Number of colour figures | Number of black and white figures | Number of audio files | Number of video files | Number of Code Ocean Widgets | Any other file formats |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | n/a |

**Pedagogical features, digital functionality, or other text extension material that could be hosted alongside the Element on the Cambridge platform?**

n/a

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