

Governing Energy

Culture as Philosophy

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In the last edition, we discussed cultural transformation through the lens of physical operations. This text addresses culture from a metaphysical perspective.

In his book, *A Philosophy of Culture*, Morton White argues that metaphysics and epistemology are empirical disciplines.ⁱ One can narrowly define *epistemology* as the study of knowledge and justified belief.ⁱⁱ Metaphysical is derived from the Greek, *meta ta physika*—after the things of nature.ⁱⁱⁱ

In other words, their existence is verifiable by observation or experience as opposed to theory or logic.^{iv} Morton goes on to present his case that the philosophy of culture is more inclusive than philosophy of science in that it encompasses the broader aspects that make up a shared set of beliefs or civilization.^v

When an organization or industry (civilization) becomes one of a Culture of Safety, by definition it meets the test of metaphysics and/or epistemology. It will exhibit traits of a knowledge and belief system that so identify it.

The journey to a Culture of Safety is a set of processes that can be measured and managed. The resulting Philosophy of a Culture of Safety will be broad, encompassing a full stage of societal behaviors indicative of vigorous systemic activity. Not simply one of slogans and a more passive premise about safety.

Cultural change can be traumatic and appear impossible at times. However, like other transformations human kind has made over the millennium, the resulting new thinking about safety can advance our social order.

Is the philosophy of safety in your organization empirical or logical?

About the Author

Dr. [Scott M. Shemwell](#) has over 30 years technical and executive management experience primarily in the energy sector. He is the author of two books and has written extensively about the field of operations management. Shemwell is also the Managing Director of The Rapid Response Institute, a firm that focuses on providing its customers with solutions enabling operations excellence and regulatory compliance management.

End Notes

ⁱ <http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/24993-a-philosophy-of-culture-the-scope-of-holistic-pragmatism/>

ⁱⁱ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epistemology/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.pbs.org/faithandreason/genloss/metaph-body.html>

^{iv} <https://www.google.com/#q=define+empirical>

^v Morton White. (2005). A Philosophy of Culture: The Scope of Holistic Pragmatism, Princeton University Press.