

The Compelling Benefits of a Scientific Approach to SA's Future By Michael Lee

Skoobs Theatre of Books, Shop 74, Montecasino
6pm, Wednesday 17th July, 2013

Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you so much for coming to Skoobs Theatre of Books, the most interesting book store I've ever seen, for the launch of *Knowing our Future*. Thanks to Sanjay and Colleen for organising this event. My heartfelt thanks are due to Clem Sunter, South Africa's leading scenario strategist and business thinker, for the honour of sharing this occasion with him. I'll return to Clem in a few moments.

My name is Michael and I'm a futurist from Cape Town. I recently founded the think-tank the Institute of Futurology. Thanks to one of the directors, my dear colleague Patrick Cunningham, for being here.

On the eve of the 95th birthday of our nation's inspirational founding father, and as we approach in 2014 our most interesting general election since 1994, after twenty years of democracy, the time is ripe for South Africans to reflect on our future.

A new struggle awaits us, the struggle to win the war on poverty, to significantly expand our economy, to build a society that will last not just for decades but for centuries, to build a great modern civilisation in the south of Africa.

What I offer today is a message that social ideology has been an abject failure for providing the governing principles to guide the destiny of any nation, including our own. Rather, in the 21st century we must look to science, not ideology, to ensure the best possible future for us all.

By way of introduction, I want you to realise why this time we're sharing right now is **special**. Time, by the way, has been proved by physics to be the fourth dimension of our experience of the world, alongside the 3D spatial world. Time is incredibly powerful, even magical. There are two important qualities of this time now.

Firstly, it used to be the future.

At the most fundamental level, what we can say about 2013 in South Africa is that we're a free people at peace with our neighbours. But we are hungry for success and for a new vision of where we are going.

2013 used to be the future. Back in the late 1980s and early 1990s, 2013 was far away. It could've been very different to what it is. We're a free people today largely due to the father of our nation but also to many other influential individuals including Archbishop Tutu and former president FW de Klerk. Clem Sunter, too, played a significant and memorable role through his famous high road/low road scenarios which helped to create the thought climate in which peace could be imagined and then negotiated between warring factions and sectors of our society.

It took many shifts in thinking and in consciousness to produce South Africa's internationally acclaimed miracle of 1994, including Clem's use of futuristic high road/low road scenarios. It was a momentous Imagineering exercise, one we now need to repeat to go down a new path of progress. We are all beneficiaries of the Imagineering exercise our nation went through leading up to 1994. 2013, then, used to be the future.



Secondly, this time now is special because it's the platform for our next future. I'm talking about our next future beyond the twenty year transition period that will end with next year's general election. After the New South Africa comes the Next South Africa. And it's imperative that we use the tools of the future to maximise the Next South Africa. Each moment in time is special, magical, because it used to be the future, carrying innumerable traces of time and the memories of our past evolution, and it's the platform for our next future. If that doesn't make time crucial, then I don't know what does. And so, I see all humans as time travellers.

We are each a simple time machine. We have a rear view mirror called memory and we have a windscreen called foresight to look at the road ahead. As little time machines we are moving rapidly into the future whether we are ready or not. Time, even more than money, makes the world go round. Everything, including our lives, passes through cycles determined by the laws of nature and the laws of social development. Believe me, most of life is predictable because most of life is caused within these pre-determined cycles of existence.

The patterns of time formed by all evolving phenomena, in nature and in society, enable us to read their future evolution in as process I call preconstruction of the future. These causal influences weave the complex tapestry of the future and it is possible to anticipate this future tapestry. That is what my new book Knowing our Future is all about – how to read the future and how the great prognostic forward looking thinkers of the past predicted the long-term future, sometimes with spectacular success and other times with equally spectacular failure. Let me present to you a perspective which is able to deliver successfully to us the Next South Africa.

As I mentioned, science is the key to attaining our best future. We need a proven effective method for solving our problems and for providing a unifying intellectual framework for policy development or our hugely diverse society. I also believe in religious freedom and freedom to think independently in a rational manner. It is science alone which can unify different religions, races and political groups under one umbrella of reason for understanding the world and solving common problems with practical solutions derived from the laws of reality.

Most importantly, I need tonight to highlight the dire failure of ideology throughout the modern age, and especially in the catastrophic twentieth century, to provide lasting social solutions for increasingly complex modern societies like ours. I would like to propose the view that

ideology has been causing mayhem on earth for centuries. It should be confined to the only place where it's safe to practise it – in private and in the voluntary sector of society. Ideology took America directly into Vietnam, while science took America to the moon and more recently to Mars. That's the difference right there between science and ideology. Ideology took South Africa to the brink of civil war through the systems of apartheid and today ideology is once again locking up potential in our country with declining productivity and political Cronyism.

Ideology has always lead to conflict. Think of the religious wars in Europe after the Reformation. Think of the bloody 20th century battles fought in the name of capitalism, communism and fascism. The leading cause of death in the world today is not cancer, it's ideology. And science is the only hope for curing both. Let me quantify the dangerous role ideology played throughout the 20th century in terms of lives lost in human conflict. In other words, let's calculate the rate of deaths caused by ideology in the previous century. Just before 11 am on Sunday, 28 June 1914, near Sarajevo's Latin Bridge, a 24 year-old Serbian radical called Gustavo Princip fired two shots which assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand, and his wife Sophie.

This terrorist act triggered a complex chain reaction of political events. As heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, the archduke's death could not go unanswered. In response, this empire soon declared war on Serbia. But allies of both sides reacted and became embroiled in the conflict which escalated into WorldWar I. Then in 1918, the peace of Versailles which ended this war has been widely seen as one of the causes of the Second World War due to the severe conditions it imposed on the defeated Germany. After the World War Two, the two new superpowers emerging from that international conflict, the USA and the USSR, entered into a Cold War between communism and capitalism which lasted until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

So between 28th June 1914 and the 9th November, 1989, when the guards at the checkpoints of East Berlin first allowed East Germans to freely pass into West Berlin, there had been two world wars, followed by a Cold War between from 1947, all triggered in a chain reaction by two bullets from one young assassin. Totting up the military and civilian deaths looks like this: WW1 - About 17 million. WW11 - About 60 million; ColdWar About 2 million – Vietnam War/Second Indochina War (1955-1975) About 1,2 million; KoreanWar (1950–1953) About 1.5 million;

Soviet war in Afghanistan (1979–1989) In all, that's about **81.7 million lives** in **75 years** of interconnected twentieth political conflict. This represents a rate of well over **1 million deaths per year** or **2740 deaths per day** in political conflict during that **1914-1989** period. We are talking about the most catastrophic political chain reaction of all time. Ideology is deadly. Yet political systems and parties today are still largely formed around ideological principles. By contrast, let's look at the benefits of using a scientific framework instead. It's science that's the key to innovation, to understanding the laws of nature, to problem-solving, and even to wealth Creation. Here, then, are the top **seven** compelling benefits of a scientific approach to the future of South

Africa in no particular order.

1. Science provides an ideology-neutral framework for the advancement of social order and Peace. Science promotes reason, freedom of thought and it's ideology-neutral, gender-blind and colour-blind. It's the ideal framework for discussing and solving common social problems.

2. Science provides a code of ethics, enshrining the values of discipline, professionalism and precision of thinking, as well as the benefits of cooperative thinking. The disciplines of science enable societies and people to get things done with a high degree of professionalism and integrity.

3. Science can create a knowledge-based society. Science has proven itself to be the best way to gain and apply knowledge. Let's start a science and knowledge revolution in South Africa right here and now at Skoobs.

4. Science promotes progress and technological innovation – it will help us reignite a passion for progress.

Science encourages innovation and problem-solving due to the fact that science is essentially knowledge based on the laws of nature, that is how things really work, not how we think they will work. It's a model for steering our evolution as a society towards continuous progress.

The Square Kilometre Array (SKA) Astronomy project (www.ska.ac.za) is the world's next greatest science project and it's happening right on our doorstep!

SKA Phase 1 (2016 – 2020) 254 radio telescope dishes in the Northern Cape, about 80 km from Carnarvon. 96 dishes in Western Australia.

SKA Phase 2 (2018 - 2024; about 90% of the SKA) About 3 000 SKA radio telescope dishes across Africa, most of them concentrated in the Northern Cape, but also with antenna stations in Namibia, Botswana, Zambia, Mozambique, Kenya, Ghana, Madagascar and Mauritius.

This project will give a massive boost to science in our country.

5. Science will teach us how to be more environmentally friendly. The long-range social future will be dominated by the environment and science is the best way we know for harnessing knowledge of nature.

6. Science will give us greater confidence about ourselves.

The problem-solving capacity of science, under an umbrella of rational peaceful pursuit of solutions and knowledge, will give our national confidence a much-needed lift as well as a new vision to unite us.

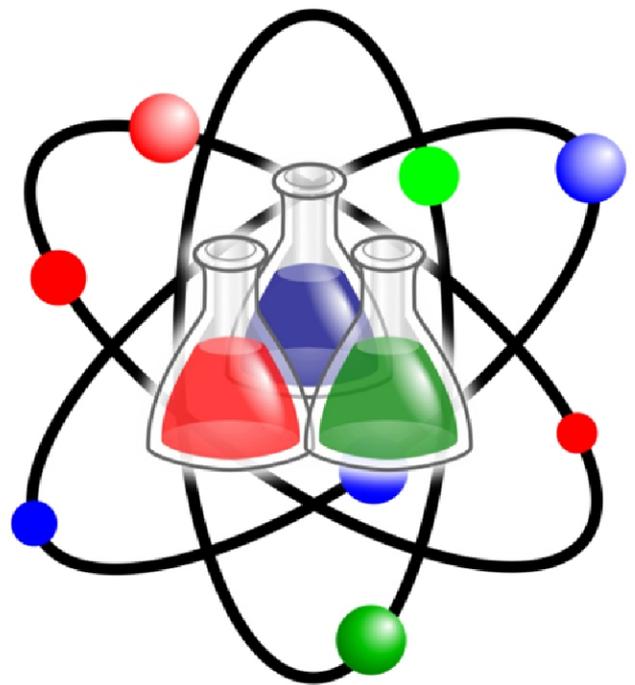
7. Science will give us detailed pictures, models and forecast of the future, producing a new generation of proactive, dynamic, self-confident South Africans.

I believe in reducing uncertainty through knowledge, that we can know the future well enough to plan for it and to create a more peaceful and prosperous world. *Knowing our Future* describes in detail what the future is as understood by the current laws of physics.

It also shows how there are proven cycles of history and social evolution which provide the tapestry for reading the social future. It presents a comprehensive theory for developing a science of the future, arguing that the future can be known and understood, enabling human beings to be more proactive and confident about the future.

This knowledge can give individuals, organisations and even societies a competitive advantage, enabling them to be one step ahead in the march of progress. Collectively, there is enough knowledge to set humanity free from uncertainty and fear of the future.

In short, taking these seven benefits together, we can see science as a peaceful, knowledge-based, rational, innovative, problem-solving, environmentally-friendly, future-facing approach to the development of our society.



Science

Since the future is going to be more and more technology-driven, the Next South Africa will go far beyond the politics of the new South Africa. The Next South Africa will be engendered by a scientific revolution, the only kind of revolution that can help us win the war on poverty.



As I come to a close, I have a message for our beautiful Born Free generation. The Institute of Futurology is delighted to be collaborating with FutureSmart, a division of BBN – Building Bridges Nationwide whose vision for the nation is called SHEP SA – Safe, High Employment and Prosperous SA, a legacy BBN wants for all our children, youth and future generations. It’s about cultivating dynamic social entrepreneurs across the country and training our youth to become **job creators** while also preparing them to become people of value, social entrepreneurs and effective leaders in building cohesive communities. I ask you, which Clem Sunter, Archbishop Tutus and Nelson Mandelas of the Born Free generation will rise up to shape the Next South Africa? I’d like to end with a poem. If you look down the wrong end of a telescope you will see a very small world. That is like people who only look to the past. However, if you look through the right end of the telescope you will see a big world, one that reaches to the horizon and beyond. We are time travellers who should face the future.

Lens of Time

Let me not look down the wrong end of time’s lens
into a world of statues frozen in memory
hypnotised by immutable mistakes
but flee fast to a new morning
where the mountaintop
overlooks the horizon.
I won’t look back
or ever stop leaving
going where I’m free to go
aiming for better times I choose
where defeats lead on to opportunities
forgetting what’s behind to seek only the living.

Now it’s my pleasure to introduce one of my intellectual heroes.



About Clem Sunter

Clem Sunter is widely respected as South Africa’s leading scenario strategist who helped shaped our national future with his high road/low road scenarios at the time of the transition of power to the new South Africa. He is author of the internationally popular trilogy of Fox books: *The Mind of a Fox - Scenario Planning in Action*, *Games Foxes Play - Planning for Extraordinary*