

Peter Robinson: Welcome to Uncommon Knowledge. I am Peter Robinson. Thomas Sowell has studied and taught economics, intellectual history and social policy at institutions that include Cornell, UCLA and Amherst. Now a Senior Fellow of the Hoover Institution, Dr. Sowell has published more than a dozen books, many more than a dozen books actually. I was just too lazy to count them all up. The one with which we will concern ourselves today, his classic work, first published in 1987 and the republished last year, *A Conflict of Visions, Segment 1, The Two Visions*. Let me quote from *A Conflict of Visions*. “When interests are at stake the parties directly affected usually understand what the issue is. However, when there is a conflict of visions, those most powerfully affected by a particular vision may be the least aware of its underlying assumptions.” Explain that distinction between interests and visions.

Thomas Sowell: Interests articulated to the people who have particular interests know what they are and know what they are trying to do.

Peter Robinson: If you are a farmer in Iowa, you want the ethanol subsidy because you will get a higher price for your corn.

Thomas Sowell: Absolutely.

Peter Robinson: All right.

Thomas Sowell: But with visions it is different. These are the implicit assumptions with which you operate. You may not articulate them even to yourself, but you are assuming certain things when you talk or when you think. Seldom are those things spelled out.

Peter Robinson: Now in *A Conflict of Visions* you talk about two fundamentally different visions. These two fundamental visions underlie an enormous amount of the western political tradition.

Thomas Sowell: Yes.

Peter Robinson: The constrained vision and the unconstrained vision. Let me take a stab at a type definition of each. Then you correct it for me. Under the constrained vision, an example would be Adam Smith. Human nature is flawed, but it is fixed and the question is how do we erect institutions, contain our flaws and permit us to live in the best possible society given an affect the fallen nature of, or the fallen character of human nature/

Thomas Sowell: Yes absolutely.

Peter Robinson: So when you say constrained, it is a vision of human nature itself. Human nature is fixed, flawed and therefore we operate within constraints. The constraints human nature itself provides. Unconstrained is human nature itself is malleable and you say that Russo, man is born free but every where he is in chains. That is the classic statement of the unconstrained.

Thomas Sowell: Yes.

Peter Robinson: Would you explain that?

Thomas Sowell: Yes. The things that we suffer, according to the unconstrained vision, is because of the failure of other people to be as wise or as noble as themselves because there are no inherent reasons for us to be unhappy.

Peter Robinson: So one looks at pain and difficulty in the world and says, this is the way life is. We will never eliminate it, let us be wise and prudent and direct institutions that make life as much as better as possible. That is constrained.

Thomas Sowell: Yes.

Peter Robinson: The unconstrained vision looks at pain and suffering and says we must remake the world. There are institutions causing this pain and suffering.

Thomas Sowell: Absolutely.

Peter Robinson: Okay, now let me give you another quotation. "The two great revolutions in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century in France and in America can be viewed as applications of these different visions. Explain that one.

Thomas Sowell: Well in France the idea was that if you simply put the right people in charge and created the right institutions, then all these problems would go away. In the United States, it was assumed from the outset that there were very limited things you could do and what you needed to do above all was to minimize the damage done by the flaws of human nature. This is why the United States for example has the Constitution, so much lamented by some of those who believe in the French Revolution in which this group is offset by that group and nobody can sort of run wild. If you believe that what you need is to have the right leaders who love the people and so on, a Messiah as it were, then your problems are solved. But if you do not believe there is any political Messiah, and you believe that you have to make sure that all people are restrained in what they are able to do, then you have the separation of power, you have elections, you have Constitutions, you have all kinds of things hemming you in. According to Houssay who was a great supporter of the French Revolution, could not understand why there was this separation of powers. Not even when at the end of his life, he was arbitrarily thrown into prison where he continued to write about why the Americans have this separation of power. And of course if there is going to be a separation of power he would not be rotting in prison.

Peter Robinson: Right. If I could just, you have Francis, the unconstrained vision; 18<sup>th</sup> Century America is the constrained vision, Founding Father, the constrained vision. Could I ask if it goes even farther back? What comes to mind is Carl Poppers *The Open Society and Its Enemies* there is a famous chapter in there in which he contrasts Plato whom he views as a radical, the man who once ruled by the philosopher Kings, with

Aristotle, whom he views as a kind of piecemeal reformer, what you get in Plato is the impulse to start anew and what you get in Aristotle is the impulse to accept the givenness of things and make one change see how it works out, another change see how it works out. In other words, I guess what I am getting at is, is there some sense in which these two visions can be traced all the way through the western traditions?

Thomas Sowell: Oh, absolutely, absolutely.

Peter Robinson: That is a fair statement.

Thomas Sowell: Yes.

Peter Robinson: All right. In this country, you talked about France versus the United States, but what about American versus Americans? John Adams versus Thomas Jefferson for example? Is that a fair contrast? Adams would be constrained and Jefferson unconstrained?

Thomas Sowell: To some extent, yes. Jefferson when the complaints were made about the people who were innocent people killed in the course of the French Revolution, he said that I would rather half the world be destroyed, then it should fail. But of course as it went on, Jefferson backed away and he did turn ultimately against it.

Peter Robinson: All rights. So what you get.

Thomas Sowell: He had a more unconstrained vision. But not totally.

Peter Robinson: What I would like to do now is turn to these visions as they play out in contemporary American politics, but before I do that I want to make sure I understand you. Your vision is that the Founding Fathers, the fundamental institutions of the United States, reflect the constrained vision.

Thomas Sowell: Absolutely.

Peter Robinson: And that therefore what you get within the American tradition is degrees of the constrained or the unconstrained vision? You do not get clean, sharp disagreements. Or is that untrue?

Thomas Sowell: You do get it. The whole erosion of the Constitution largely by the courts is the notion that no we have to look out for the public interest and therefore we will not worry about the constraints of the Constitution as much as some people would like.

Peter Robinson: All right, which takes us to segment two. Two visions of the law. The constrained vision of the law and here I quote A Conflict of Visions "Oliver Wendell Holmes expressed it when he declared the life of the law has not been logic, it has been experience."

Thomas Sowell: Yes.

Peter Robinson: How is he giving expression to the constrained vision?

Thomas Sowell: That there is no one who from sheer intellectual power can tell you what the law ought to be, that we learn from trial and error simply because we are not capable of learning everything, just by figuring it all out. The unconstrained vision of the law, here you quote John Stewart Mills “to look at legal precedence was” I am quoting you “in Mills view to make” and here you quote Mill “an absurd sacrifice of present ends antiquated”

Peter Robinson: What he has done here. How is he giving voice to the unconstrained?

Thomas Sowell: This is the notion that we need someone to come along and update the law from his own intellectual resources rather than from the actual experience of millions of people in generation after generation. No one believes the law should remain fixed as it was at some given point in the past. The question is who shall have the authority to change that law and with what constraints on that person so that person is not just giving in to his own feelings or imaginings or theories.

Peter Robinson: All right. Let me give you a couple of quotations. John McCain in the Presidential debate of October 16<sup>th</sup>, on the kinds of judges he would nominate to the Supreme Court “I will find the best people in the United States of America who have a history of strict adherence to the constitution and not legislating from the bench.” Barack Obama, during the same debate, “If a woman is out there trying to raise a family, trying to support her family and is being treated unfairly, then the court has to stand up if nobody else will and that is the kind of judge I want.”

Thomas Sowell: That is unconstrained. That some how or other there are people with the judicial robes on who can just decide these things ad hoc which among other things would mean we would no longer really have law. You would discover once you got into the courtroom in front of the judge, you would then discover what the decision is which we have no clue before hand.

Peter Robinson: So that would, a full embrace of the unconstrained vision, which Barack Obama seems intent on, would overturn the fundamental basis of American law which is a nation of laws not of men.

Thomas Sowell: Absolutely.

Peter Robinson: Would be a nation of men, of judges.

Thomas Sowell: Yes.

Peter Robinson: September of this year, the Rasmussen Polling Company asked this question. “Should the Supreme Court make decisions based on what is written in the

Constitution and legal precedence, or should it be guided mostly by the sense of fairness and justice?" Eighty two percent of McCain supporters said the Supreme Court should base its decision on the Constitution, 29% of Obama supporters agreed, 11% of McCain supporters said the Supreme Court should make its decisions on fairness, 49% of Obama supporters said that it should. Now here is the question. You have said, McCain constrained, Obama unconstrained. But what this would seem to indicate, this polling data, that this is not just a debate taking place among politicians or American elite, it has reached very deep into the American core. Forty-nine percent of Americans think the Supreme Court

Thomas Sowell: Of Obama supporters.

Peter Robinson: Excuse me, 49% of Obama supporters, exactly. So does that startle you, does that alarm you?

Thomas Sowell: It does not startle me, it depresses me. But, this has been going on for a long time. People complain about a court decision on the basis that they wish it had turned out differently. But, that is not the judge's job. There was a wonderful case, and I wish I could remember the title of it, which Clarence Thomas said that he really agreed with the position taken by one of the litigants in the case, but that he was not there to decide that issue. He was there to decide what did the law say. The law said otherwise and so he voted against them. You see the same thing in Oliver Wendell Holmes, where a number of cases he makes very cutting disparagements at one of the litigants in the case, and then votes in favor of them. Because I am not here to decide what the merit is. In one of his decision he said I am not at liberty to discuss the justice of the act. The act is what it is, and once I know what that is, that is the decision I have to make.

Peter Robinson: Well, then if you see, one more question, you write "the unconstrained vision", again I am quoting you, "has tended historically toward creating more equalized economic and social conditions in society, even if the means chosen implied great inequality and the right to decide such issues and choose such means". Inequality in the right to decide issues. Does that tell us why the left in the United States seems so much more comfortable with having courts make social

Thomas Sowell: Absolutely.

Peter Robinson: That is what is going on.

Thomas Sowell: Absolutely. They want equality of outcomes and they will choose how to make the outcomes equal. But they do not want equality of choice on the part of the people themselves. Many of the liberals say they are for the family because they are for creating all kinds of goodies to give to families. But they want to take away the families fundamental function which is making decisions for members of the family itself, particularly the younger members who are not yet grown.

Peter Robinson: In the current political context and we are taping this program, just two weeks before the election, how do you see, what opportunity is there for those who believe in the constrained vision as regards to the law to advance their view, to advance the constrained vision and beat back the unconstrained vision?

Thomas Sowell: I guess you argue for it as you do for other things. But I think what happens is that many people vote; they do not think that far ahead. They say I like this guy and so on, they do not think what kind of judges will he be putting on the courts, on the Federal Bench, will be there 20 and 30 years from now, who will be turning loose criminals let us say, for 20 or 30 years.

Peter Robinson: Right, right. Well, I know that you have some reservations about John McCain as a candidate and we will come to some of those, I suspect, actually I have some questions intentionally to provoke you, Dr. Sowell. But would you say that on this issue alone, that the next President is likely to be able to nominate two or three justices?

Thomas Sowell: Absolutely.

Peter Robinson: That is decisive for you.

Thomas Sowell: Yes.

Peter Robinson: All right, okay. Segment three, Two Visions of War. The constrained vision and again I am quoting from your book A Conflict of Visions. "War is seen as originating human nature and being contained by institutions." The unconstrained vision "those with the unconstrained vision tend to explain war in terms of either misunderstandings or of hostile or paranoid emotions raised to such a pitch as to override rationality". Is it fair to say that the constrained vision is not surprised by war, but the unconstrained vision is always a little startled when a war breaks out.

Thomas Sowell: Absolutely. You can take this back to the Federalists, where they said why do we think that the 13 colonies will make war on each other if they are not united. The answer was because that is what countries have always done. It is not a question of, it is not just war, it is war, it is poverty, it is crime. All those are things which people with the unconstrained vision feel needs explaining. Whereas people with the constrained vision think what needs explaining is how do we sustain peace, how do we have law and order, how do we have morality?

Peter Robinson: How would you interpret then, I think it is, I cannot remember if Robert Kennedy was quoting someone else or if this was original to him or to his speech writers the quotation is something like "Some see the world and ask why, I see what could be and ask why not."

Thomas Sowell: Yes, yes.

Peter Robinson: That is the kind of, that is the unconstrained vision in a nutshell.

Thomas Sowell: Absolutely.

Peter Robinson: All right. John McCain in February, 2003, this is the constrained and unconstrained vision as they apply to the question of warfare. "In this age liberating oppressed people's from tyranny, from the tyranny of those who would do us harm, serves not only narrow national interest, but the ordered progress of freedom." Barack Obama in August of last year "in the first 100 days of my administration, I will travel to a major Islamic forum and deliver an address to redefine our struggle. I will make clear that we will stand with those who are willing to stand up for their future and that we need their efforts to defeat the prophets of hate and violence." What do you make of those two?

Thomas Sowell: I think Barack Obama has a lot more faith in verbal interactions than I would.

Peter Robinson: That is the unconstrained vision.

Thomas Sowell: Absolutely. What he is proposing under the guise of change is what has been tried for two decades between the two world wars and which failed disastrously in helping to bring on the Second World War.

Peter Robinson: Well that brings up another point. Is it fair to say that the constrained vision is more aware of history, that somehow or other there is an appreciation of it and even a hunger for historical understanding, searching for precedent, what has worked before. Most things will not work, therefore, we must discover, we must work especially hard to discover what has worked in the past. In the unconstrained vision, is there something, you do not say this in the book, this is a question on which I am taking a flyer here, but is there something also anti-intellectual about the unconstrained vision an unwillingness to look at the large facts of history.

Thomas Sowell: There is an unwillingness to look at the facts of history and it is anti-intellectual in a sense of intellectual process is unfortunately all too characteristic of intellectuals as an occupational category. Between the two world wars, it was the intellectuals of the western world who talked the biggest nonsense. It was Burch and Russell who said that Britain should disarm while Hitler was building up this military machine across the channel. In France, as well, and Russell was by no means the only one in England.

Peter Robinson: So why? Why would the unconstrained vision prove so particularly appealing to intellectuals? I think we can say if I said to you what would you expect to survey of the faculties of the top 100 academic institutions in the United States to show, if we could come up with a set of questions, that would show whether the faculty adhere to the constrained or unconstrained vision, you and I would both expect a huge majority to subscribe to the unconstrained.

Thomas Sowell: Absolutely.

Peter Robinson: How come? Why? Why is that appealing to intellectuals?

Thomas Sowell: That is a tough one, but I think that I guess the short answer is they imagine that good people like themselves to make this thing go and if it has not worked in the past, it is only because they have not had the right people doing it. In other words, Communism would have worked if it had not been for Stalin. But of course, once you have a system like Communism, people like Stalin are the ones who will come to the floor.

Peter Robinson: All right. Back to warfare and defense. Barack Obama's plan for defense spending as of last year, I am quoting him, I am quoting his speech "I will stop spending \$9 billion a month in Iraq, I will cut tens of billions in wasteful spending, I will cut investments in unproven missile defense systems, I will not weaponize space, I will slow our development to future combat systems and I will institute an independent defense priorities board to avoid unnecessary spending".

Thomas Sowell: That is great, out of the 1930's there were people that were saying Britain should not, the British Labor Board in the early to mid 1930's voted consistently against defense spending. They argued that our security does not depend on armaments but on disarmaments. So, when Chamberlain went to Munich to talk to Hitler, it was not just his own party the conservatives that applauded him when he came back, it was the labor and liberals as well. He was probably the most lionized man among western leaders perhaps of the past century.

Peter Robinson: John McCain, you just compared Barack Obama to Chamberlain, I am going to see if I can get you to compare John McCain to Churchill, how is that?

Thomas Sowell: A little bit harder.

Peter Robinson: I will take a shot at it. John McCain, it is very hard to find, at least I found it hard to find, an elaborated defense spending plan in McCain's website and campaign, but he has at least at one point advocated an across the board Federal spending freeze, but excepted defense spending from that freeze. He would also, and this is a quotation from a recent speech "increase the size of the United States Army and Marine Corps from the currently planned level of roughly 750,000 troops to 900,000 troops." So, what you get in John McCain, this I think is fair to say even if I cannot find a specific proposal to get you to comment on, the notion that here is Federal spending, and here is defense spending and it occupies because it must a privileged position within the structure of Federal spending. What do you make of that?

Thomas Sowell: Well I think he recognized that you have to survive before you do anything else.

Peter Robinson: All right. So that strikes you as just good common sense.

Thomas Sowell: Yes.

Peter Robinson: And McCain does not strike you as too belligerent?

Thomas Sowell: Defending yourself is not belligerent.

Peter Robinson: All right, all right. Two visions of the economy. Again I am going to begin by quoting from A Conflict of Visions. “The constrained vision sees market economies as responsive to systemic forces, the interaction of innumerable individual choices and performances. The unconstrained vision argues that this is not how the economy operates, that it is currently obeying the power of particular interests and should therefore be made in future to obey the power of the public interest.”

Thomas Sowell: Yes.

Peter Robinson: Explain that.

Thomas Sowell: Well they imagine they can define the public interest by themselves. Whereas in a market each individual defines his own interest himself and acts accordingly and interacting with other people, accommodating other people and competing with other people.

Peter Robinson: All right. A couple of quotations here. This time I am not going to contrast McCain with Obama. I am going to begin with a quotation, here it is. “We who live in free market societies believe that growth, prosperity and ultimately human fulfillment are created from the bottom up, not the government down. Let our banner proclaim our belief in a free market as the greatest provider for the people.” Ronald Reagan.

Thomas Sowell: Yes, I thought so.

Peter Robinson: You did. All right. Now John McCain on September 15<sup>th</sup>. “The American people are being threatened today because of greed and corruption that some engaged in on Wall Street and that we have got to fix.” What do you make of what is going on in the Republican Party? Reagan into McCain.

Thomas Sowell: Decline. When people ask me why am I going to vote for McCain rather than Obama it is because I prefer disaster to catastrophe.

Peter Robinson: All right. You are not supposed to through things at me from which I have to use valuable time to recover Tom. Listen to an exchange between Barack Obama and Joe Wurzelbacher, now known universally as Joe the Plumber. This took place on October 11<sup>th</sup>. Joe the Plumber: “Your new tax plan is going to tax me more isn’t it?” Barack Obama: “It is not that I want to punish your success, I just want to make sure that everybody who is behind you, that they have a chance to success too. I think when you spread the wealth around, it is good for everybody.” What do you make of that one?

Thomas Sowell: Oh, I think it is classical left ideology. By the way, he wants to spread Joe the Plumber's wealth around, he is not spreading his wealth around, we all know about his half brother in Africa who is living in dire poverty. It has been fascinating to me these various people who want to spend the tax payers money, but who when it comes to charitable giving and so forth or their own, have no idea of doing that. I do not know if you are familiar with the study that has been done of liberals and conservatives donating money and giving time as volunteers and donating blood and so on, and contrary to what everybody expected, the conservatives do more in all of those things. The study showed that if everyone donated blood at the same rate at which conservatives donate blood, there would be 45% more blood donated in the United States than there is.

Peter Robinson: And also, weren't you struck by Joe Biden's tax forms when they were released. He has had an income that is roughly triple that of Sarah Palin and yet his charitable contributions have been much smaller, much smaller.

Thomas Sowell: Absolutely.

Peter Robinson: Let me try it with John McCain one more time. Two assertions he made in the very same five minute radio talk. Both come from radio talk on October 18<sup>th</sup>. "At least in Europe, the Socialist leaders who so admire my opponent are up front about their objectives, raising taxes on some in order to give checks to others is not a tax cut it is just another government giveaway." Excuse me this is not from the radio talk, but it is from a rally he gave on the same day. He was talking about the need to address the financial crisis by buying up mortgages. "We need to give you a mortgage that you can afford so you can realize the American dream of owning your home." Which vision does John McCain represent?

Thomas Sowell: He represents whichever one occurs at the moment.

Peter Robinson: All right.

Thomas Sowell: He has what \_\_\_\_\_ (26:09) called a versatility of convictions.

Peter Robinson: Here is the argument. The argument would be, look, John McCain is in a tight spot, he is trailing, he is fundamentally the constrained vision, that is to say he fundamentally supports free markets, and his record shows an overwhelming majority of the times where there is a vote in Congress they can be recorded as free market or anti-free market, he is on the free market side. He is maneuvering here. Be realistic Tom Sowell, politicians have to do that, cut the man a little slack.

Thomas Sowell: Well if I were in his camp perhaps I would say that. My job is not to cut him any slack, my job is to inform the people who read what I have to say.

Peter Robinson: All right. Back to Barack Obama. You mentioned the, I think you would call it a naïve view of world affairs that he places a great deal of faith in rhetoric, the ability of rhetoric to solve global problems. Does this remind you of the 1930's, does

it remind you of Neville Chamberlain? I read you a quotation of the notion of spreading the wealth around and again you said that is perfectly pure socialist doctrine from the 1930's. Would you argue that this man is the most left wing or the purist embrace of the unconstrained vision that we have seen in American politics since when, the New Deal?

Thomas Sowell: Since there has been American politics.

Peter Robinson: Really?

Thomas Sowell: Yes. I mean even FDR, pulled back on some things. But Obama really he does have the unconstrained vision, which is really an elitist vision. It says, I know what is the best to be done and I will do it. When he says I will change the world, you realize this is a man who is actually accomplished nothing other than advancing his career through rhetoric. It reminds of a sophomore in college who thinks that he can run the world because he has never had to run anything. You can believe that only until you have personal responsibility for consequences and that is when it gives you a little bit of humility.

Peter Robinson: Why don't the American people see through that? Isn't that the fundamental bed that the Founders made that voters would see through, ultimately they would see through nonsense.

Thomas Sowell: Yes, but that was before nonsense because a large part of the curriculum of or educational institutions.

Peter Robinson: Segment 5. The two visions and the nature of the campaign. Again, I begin by quoting from A Conflict of Visions "Those with a constrained vision have tended to be less concerned with promoting economic and social equality, but more concerned with the dangers of inequality of power producing an articulate ruling elite of rationalists." That gets to Bill Buckley's famous quotation about he would rather be ruled by the first 2,000 names in the Boston phone book, then by the Harvard faculty. That is the point, right?

Thomas Sowell: Yes.

Peter Robinson: If you perform a Google search on Obama, plus the word professorial, you will get more than 62,000 hits. What does that suggest to you? What is going on here?

Thomas Sowell: We need to go to the phone book.

Peter Robinson: Where the wise, again, I am quoting from A Conflict of Visions "where the wise and conscientious individuals conceive to be competent to shape outcomes directly" this is the unconstrained vision, I Barack Obama, know what is best for you. This is the way you put it a moment ago, then his sincerity is crucial. "Sincerity is so central to an unconstrained vision that it is not readily conceded to adversaries".

Thomas Sowell: That goes back at least 200 years that people who have the strange vision understand that people will make mistakes and so therefore when someone say something they disagree with that to them is just one of the examples of it. They see no need to question his sincerity or honesty or whatever. For those with the unconstrained vision, what they believe seems so obviously true that if you are standing in the way of it, either you must be incredibly stupid, utterly uninformed or simply dishonest.

Peter Robinson: Let me read you a few of the terms that have been used to describe Sarah Palin. Liar – Andrea Sullivan. Cancer – David Brooks.

Thomas Sowell: Oh yes.

Peter Robinson: Jesus Freak – Bill Maher. Reactionary – Catha Pullet. Zealot – Maureen Dowd. Is that part of what is going on here?

Thomas Sowell: Yes. People like that find it very hard to believe that someone else could honestly, sincerely, and intelligently reach a different conclusion. They talk about how complex the world is but it never seems to complex enough that other people can have read the same evidence they looked at and come up with a different conclusion.

Peter Robinson: The implicit visions, again, you write in your conclusions, “divide controversialists at all levels and across the boundaries of the law, the economy and the society”. The constrained vision versus the unconstrained vision. How is an informed American to choose between those two visions?

Thomas Sowell: I suppose you would require thinking about it first of all, which is where a lot of people do not do anymore. I mean there are people who simply react because they like the way someone sounds, and unfortunately more and more such people vote.

Peter Robinson: So it is a question of education.

Thomas Sowell: In one sense yes and in another sense no. I think before so many people went to colleges and universities, common sense was probably much more widespread.

Peter Robinson: Why is that? Why is it that we keep coming back to higher education as a kind of pollutant in the American political system? That has been a theme of our conversation. Why? What is going on?

Thomas Sowell: That is a tough one. That is my next book which is about intellectuals.

Peter Robinson: Really?

Thomas Sowell: Yes.

Peter Robinson: What conclusions have you reached so far?

Thomas Sowell: That all the incentives are for people who are intellectuals in a sense that I would define the term to venture beyond what we are competent to do. That is we know that who is the man at MIT the linguist. Now I am trying?

Peter Robinson: Noam Chomsky.

Thomas Sowell: You know the man is a landmark figure in the study of linguistics.

Peter Robinson: Yes.

Thomas Sowell: But we would never have heard of him if he stuck to linguistics.

Peter Robinson: True enough.

Thomas Sowell: We know that our wonderful colleague, Mr. Ehrlich is

Peter Robinson: Paul Ehrlich here at Stanford.

Thomas Sowell: Yes, has reputation in etymology, but we would never have heard of him if he had stuck to etymology. So all the incentives are to go beyond what you are competent to deal with and to just assume because you are wonderful at this, that this makes you sort of a general philosopher king.

Peter Robinson: All right. If the current polls hold the Wall Street Journal and I am quoting the Wall Street Journal now declared in an editorial last week "Barack Obama will win the White House on November 4<sup>th</sup> and Democrats will consolidate their Congressional majorities. Though we doubt that most American realize it" the Journal continues, "This would be one of the most profound political and ideological shifts in U.S. history." Would you agree with that?

Thomas Sowell: Absolutely. And the repercussions will extend, the fact that it will create disasters in the economy I think will pale by comparison to what they will do in terms of countries acquiring nuclear weapons and turning those over to terrorists. Which is the point of no return once that happens.

Peter Robinson: Right. Do you, I was talking about this with a colleague of ours the other day, Tom McCurdy who is an economist here at the Hoover Institution and Tom said well remember what happened when Bill Clinton became President. His point is the American people are about to get an extreme illustration of the way government intervention messes things up. Bill Clinton offered only a mild illustration and yet even under Bill Clinton there was only two years before Republicans, before there was enough of a back lash response that Republicans took both Houses of Congress away and the man was boxed in from that point forward. That is a pretty optimistic reading of what might happen. Very optimistic?

Thomas Sowell: Yes, because there is such a thing as a point of no return and if in those first two years, Iran gets nuclear weapons, we will be at that point of no return. The next generation will live under that same threat and as far out as the eye can see. Sometimes people will get very clever and say “it is just as well to let these guys get in there and just run themselves, then we will win on the back lash.” People said that when Hitler was arising in Germany and many of those people who said that died in the concentration camps. Which is a smaller tragedy then a nation dying in a sense.

Peter Robinson: Before the primaries had ended you wrote “Hilary Clinton versus John McCain, I would not know whether to vote Libertarian or move to Australia”. Now we know it is Barack Obama versus John McCain. You will vote for John McCain, but hold your nose. What is your fundamental?

Thomas Sowell: Yes. The Clinton’s had the saving grace of utter lack of principles which meant that when they saw which way the political winds were blowing, that is the way they would go regardless of what they had been saying before. This man has been a far left ideologue for 20 years and not just a man of ideology, I mean people, truly vile people, we are not talking about just people who have a certain theory. Acorn, we are talking thuggery as the way to get your ideas across. Father Flangel, go down the list and I judge people by what they have done, not by what they say, particularly when what they say is the direct opposite of what they have done. So I think this many really does believe that he can change the world, and people like that are infinitely more dangerous then mere crooked politicians.

Peter Robinson: Final question. Let us suppose that the Wall Street Journal is right, let us suppose that Barack Obama wins and that the Democrats pick up, increase their majorities in both the House and the Senate, let us suppose all of that. What would be your advice to young people, dedicated to free markets, individual liberty and broadly speaking, to the constrained vision that you write about in A Conflict of Visions? What do you do if something like this happens?

Thomas Sowell: You do whatever you find you can do under those conditions which you can only learn by experience. But if by saying what advice are you giving to someone on death row and they come to take them to the gas chamber.

Peter Robinson: Tom I am trying very hard here to find a question to end this show on an upbeat, but I do not seem to be succeeding.

Thomas Sowell: Well, one good thing is the economist predictions have been proven wrong before and you can always hope that this one will be one of those many predictions.

Peter Robinson: Dr. Thomas Sowell, author of A Conflict of Visions and author of the forthcoming second education of another classic book you wrote Applied Economics, this will be out in January.

Thomas Sowell: Yes.

Peter Robinson: Dr. Thomas Sowell, thank you very much.

Thomas Sowell: Thank you.

Peter Robinson: For Uncommon Knowledge, I am Peter Robinson, thanks for joining us.