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**ENDANGERED  
FREEDOM**

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**Thomas Sowell**

**The John Bonython Lectures**

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Orders for publications and subscription enquiries should be addressed to:

The Centre for Independent Studies  
575 Pacific Highway, St Leonards, NSW 2065  
Australia

Telephone (02) 438 4377 Fax (02) 439 7310

# **Endangered Freedom**

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**Thomas Sowell**

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# Opening Remarks

Maurice Newman  
Chairman, CIS Board of Trustees

In 1984 The Centre for Independent Studies established the John Bonython Lecture to, and I quote, 'examine the relationship between individuals and the economic, social and political factors that make up a free society'. The Lecture is named in honour of John Bonython AO, the first Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Centre. Unfortunately, John Bonython cannot be with us this evening, but he has asked me to say that he welcomes Thomas Sowell to Australia and he hopes that he will succeed in imparting some wisdom to us all. He is sorry he can't be present but is delighted with the continuing high standard of scholarship which has been sustained by the Lecture and he notes with pleasure that with the fifth Lecture something of a tradition has been established.

The Lecture provides the CIS with the opportunity to come back to and remind itself of the fundamental principle of individual freedom and responsibility that motivates and guides its studies. That need remains as great as ever, despite the present popularity around the world of such enlightened policies as lower tax rates, deregulation and privatisation. These changes are of course very welcome and are what the CIS authors and others have been promoting over many years. But we have to recognise that the benefits they bring can be pressed into the service of big government. Communist governments have started adopting some of these measures, not because they are preparing to bow out of history but because they want to make totalitarianism easier to manage. We can be certain that it is not love of individual freedom that inspires even the most reformist faction in the Kremlin. Even in Western countries politicians tend to be more interested in economic efficiency than in freedom for its own sake. The present Australian government has started leading Australia down the long road of economic liberalisation, but the same government tried to introduce a national identity system and is still intent on a less blatantly offensive alternative to the Australia Card. The safeguards of individual liberty that our founding fathers inserted in the Constitution are being eroded as Canberra continuously enhances its central control over our nominally federal system. We

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have to be alert to the many ways in which individual freedom can be lost and in some areas even as it is being increased in others.

The title of tonight's lecture, 'Endangered Freedom', brings these concerns into direct focus. I will leave it to Greg Lindsay to introduce our speaker, Thomas Sowell. All I would say is that Professor Sowell's well-known hostility towards affirmative action, reverse discrimination and similar fashionable concepts that attempt to overcome social disadvantage by elaborate schemes, stems from his acute awareness that the benefits that some people derive from such schemes also impose serious and immediate losses of freedom on others.

Now, it is my pleasure to introduce the Executive Director of The Centre for Independent Studies, Mr Greg Lindsay.



# Introduction

Greg Lindsay  
Executive Director  
The Centre for Independent Studies

Thank you very much, Maurice. I shall be brief but also very proud to introduce to you tonight a man who is clearly one of the world's most distinguished economists and social theorists.

Born in 1930, Thomas Sowell's family moved from North Carolina to New York City when he was nine. At the age of 21 he was drafted into the US Marine Corps and served for two years as a photographer, developing a passionate interest that often occupies him during the more mundane periods of his travels. His discharge from the Marine Corps enabled him under the GI Bill to enrol as a night student at Howard University in Washington, DC. He later transferred to Harvard and completed an economics degree in 1958.

That led him to Columbia where he successfully completed a Masters the following year. He spent the next few years completing a PhD under Milton Friedman at the University of Chicago while he worked in a variety of jobs: economist at the Department of Labor, instructor in Economics at Rutgers University, lecturer in Economics at Howard University, economic analyst with American Telephone and Telegraph, and finally, as Assistant Professor in Economics at Cornell. In 1968 he was awarded his PhD and moved on to teach economics at UCLA during the 1970s.

In February 1981 the newly elected President Ronald Reagan appointed Thomas Sowell to his Economic Policy Advisory Board which has as its function the duty of advising the President on domestic and foreign policies.

Since 1981 Dr Sowell has held several teaching positions at US universities and has been involved in particular in research at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. His literary output in that time has been monumental. Among the books written by him over the last seven years are: *Markets and Minorities*; *Ethnic America*; *The Economics and Politics of Race, an International Perspective*; *Knowledge and Decisions*; *Classical Economics Reconsidered*; *Pink and Brown People*; *Civil Rights*; *Rhetoric or Reality*; *Marxism: Philosophy and Economics*, and *Education, Assumptions vs. History*.

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As well as formal articles to academic journals he has contributed general and popular essays to such magazines as *Encounter*, *Policy Review* and *Newsweek*. Additionally, Thomas Sowell is a nationally syndicated columnist, making his ideas accessible to a significant number of the US population. Last year some of his more popular articles were published in the collection, *Compassion vs. Guilt*. The essays in that book cover a variety of topics from international relations to education, AIDS and nostalgia. Sometimes his tone is sombre, sometimes light and even humorous but Thomas Sowell is always thought-provoking.

Last year his latest book, *A Conflict of Visions*, was published. It deals with the importance of ideology in political, economic and social and judicial issues.

It is then with great pleasure that I ask Thomas Sowell to present the 1988 John Bonython Lecture entitled 'Endangered Freedom'.

# Endangered Freedom

Thomas Sowell

**I**N a sense, freedom is always endangered. If history shows the repeated strivings of human beings for freedom, it also shows a constant striving for power over other people — whether by bureaucrats over an economy, violent criminals over their victims, or totalitarian dictators over every aspect of life. But the threats to freedom in our times are more specific and more immediate. Both the internal and the external dangers to freedom derive from a particular vision of man.

There are as many different visions of the world as there are human beings — perhaps more, for we sometimes change our visions over a lifetime. But most of these individual visions are variations on two major visions which have struggled for supremacy in the Western world for more than two centuries. I call them the constrained vision and the unconstrained vision. These two visions have sometimes been equated with the political left and the political right. But the left-right dichotomy itself is misleading. Only the left is defined, even approximately. All those who oppose the left, for whatever reason, are lumped together as ‘the right’, however radically they may differ among themselves. Opponents of the left include monarchists and democrats, libertarians and fascists. They share no common assumptions or values. Therefore the dichotomy that lumps them together as ‘the right’ is a false dichotomy.

By contrast, the dichotomy between the constrained vision and the unconstrained vision reflects a specific set of underlying assumptions about man, about society, and about social causation. There are, of course, differences among those individuals within the general tradition of each

vision, but these are differences of degree, in a sense in which it is not true that the differences between fascists and libertarians are differences of degree.

### I. A CONFLICT OF VISIONS

What are the visions and why are they important? Visions are an image of reality in our minds — our sense of what the facts are and how causation operates. These visions are important because even the most knowledgeable individuals are grossly ignorant — and necessarily so — over vast regions of a complex society and a complex set of international relations. Visions not only substitute for knowledge; they also determine how the relatively few hard facts that we do know are fitted into some general framework.

Visions not only affect our explanations of the world around us; they determine what it is that we think needs explaining. When some social thinkers say that we must seek the 'root causes' of crime, or the 'root causes' of terrorism and war, if we are to solve these problems, they are expressing the unconstrained vision. In that vision, there are no inherent reasons why such evils exist and it is only a question of finding the proper philosophy and the proper leaders in order to banish them entirely. But when others say that crime can only be deterred — restrained but not eliminated — by punishment, and terrorism and war deterred by the threat of retaliation, they are expressing the opposite vision, the constrained vision, in which there are no solutions but only trade-offs, in which we must resort to unpleasant expedients to avoid even greater tragedies.

Historically, when the French Revolution created a government with virtually unlimited powers, in order to seek the general good and carry out the general will, it was expressing the unconstrained vision of man. But when the American Revolution created a government whose actions were hemmed in on all sides by checks and balances, it expressed the constrained vision of man as a creature whose talents and ideals could be used beneficially but whose dangerous shortcomings and evils had to be guarded against at all times. The Federalists, who wrote in justification of the US constitution that they helped shape, were quite aware that it embodied a particular vision of man. They said:

It may be a reflection on human nature that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government. But what is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature?

They asked: 'Why has government been instituted at all?' And they answered: 'Because the passions of men will not conform to the dictates of reason and justice without constraint.' Without this constrained vision of man, the whole concept of limited government made no sense. To Condorcet, one of the intellectual godfathers of the French Revolution, the American constitution indeed made no sense. He saw no need for what he

called 'overcomplicated' government machinery to 'weigh upon the people', thwarting or delaying the fulfilment of their wishes through the 'inertia' produced by the 'counterweights' of government with checks and balances. Condorcet never accepted the idea of constitutionally limited government, not even when the French Revolution took a direction he did not like, not even when he himself was thrown into prison by the arbitrary powers of government. He continued to write impassioned criticisms of the concept of limited government in the dungeon in which he spent his last days. Condorcet's thinking represented not only a particular vision, but also the **power** of a vision — its ability to defy hard facts and ignore harsh realities all around. The particular vision he espoused, the unconstrained vision, is now the prevailing vision of our time in the Western world — and the central threat to its freedom, both internally and externally.

## II. THE INTERNAL DANGER

The unconstrained vision represents a fundamental threat to the continued existence of a free society in two distinct ways: First, it undermines the legitimacy of the basic institutions of that society, even when those institutions are functioning well. Secondly, policies based on the unconstrained vision reduce the effectiveness of social and economic institutions, and thus reduce the attractiveness of life in a free society, as compared to alternative societies.

### **The Legitimacy of Institutions**

The unconstrained vision blames virtually all unhappy events on failures of social institutions and social attitudes. 'Crime cannot exist in a community that cares,' according to a poster produced by the New Zealand government. This slogan captures the essence of the unconstrained vision. If there are no severe constraints inherent in the nature of man, then crime — like other sources of unhappiness — is unnecessary and its existence is a condemnation of the society that engenders it.

No institution is more basic than the family — and none has been so consistently undermined by those with the unconstrained vision. Child abuse, oppression of women, and neglect and abuse of the elderly are only some of the charges repeatedly made against the family. All too often, both the charges and sensational statistics in support of charges originate in groups with obvious vested interests in taking over from the family in one area or another and substituting the programs of social theorists, the agenda of ideologues, or the services of psychologists and social workers. Yet, despite the obvious self-interest of individuals and organisations supplying sensational statistics, the media, by and large, accept these statistics, unquestioningly broadcast them far and wide, issue passionate editorials based on

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those unexamined numbers, and feature interviews and dramatisations to forward the cause.

One of the few reporters to look behind the numbers was a New Zealand journalist named Emily Flynn, who recently investigated a media campaign purporting to show that one girl in four was sexually molested by her own father. After she went back to the original studies on which this sensational statistic was based, after she sifted through the shifting definitions, the sloppy methodology, and the tendentious *non sequiturs* of the 'analysis', Ms Flynn discovered that less than one girl in a hundred was likely to be sexually molested by her father. Despite a massive media campaign arousing fears in mothers and daughters alike — and, not incidentally, soliciting money from the public — it turned out that fathers were the least likely of all males to sexually molest a girl. Those whom we were being taught to turn to for protection from such dangers in the family — teachers and social workers — have dozens of times higher rates of sexual molestation.

None of this is meant to deny that incestuous molestation occurs. In a society of millions of imperfect human beings, almost any evil imaginable is likely to occur somewhere, sometimes. Nothing will be easier than for media people, seized with a vision, to go out and find examples and put them in print or on television in all their tearful anguish — as if that made them typical. The usual charges of media bias tend to focus too narrowly on the ideologies prevalent among individuals in the media. This can be a legitimate concern, when the ideological preponderance is all in one direction. But there are also biases inherent in the media, as such, even when there are ideological balance and impeccable professional ethics.

The media **dramatise**, whether in news or in fiction. The individual is the focus, whether that individual is typical or atypical. Tables of statistics and regression equations do not make good newspaper reading or scintillating television viewing. Moreover, the enormous variety of subjects covered by a media journalist makes it inevitable that he cannot possibly understand what is underneath all the surfaces he glides over. Yet high visibility offers both the opportunity and the temptation to public expressions of moral indignation and media crusades about things that are not even half-understood. The most tempting targets are of course the most basic institutions of the society — which is to say, that the bias of the media, as such, is toward undermining the pillars of a free society.

Sensational campaigns against incestuous molestation are only one example, and neither it nor other forms of orchestrated hysteria is confined to New Zealand. In the United States, a statistic spread (with suitable expressions of horror) throughout the media is that one American in twelve goes hungry. The highest Gross National Product in the world and one out of twelve people goes hungry — you can easily imagine the words and the music. Virtually no one does anything so simplistic as look into the origins of this statistic.

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How do you count the hungry? Once the question is asked in that direct way, the obvious answer is that you don't — certainly not 20 million of them. Those who produced the one out of twelve statistic got it by running census data through a computer, with their own definitions added. From the census tape, you can determine how many people meet the federal government's requirement to receive food stamps. Subtract the number of people who in fact receive food stamps, and the remainder are 'hungry' — statistically at least. Using this procedure, someone discovered the 'hungriest' county in the United States. It turned out to be a farming and ranching community with relatively low money income, entitling many of its inhabitants to food stamps, though only three people in fact received food stamps. For purely statistical purposes, it does not matter how many of the people in that county were in fact eating food that they themselves grew. It does not matter if the people on the ranches were eating more steaks than most Americans. Statistically, they were hungry — and in the media it was a moral outrage.

Innumerable other crusades are based on equally shaky data. The rate of illiteracy in America ranges from less than one percent of the population to more than 30 per cent, depending on how you define your terms. Naturally, those who are seeking more government money and bigger social programs prefer definitions that lead to more alarming statistics. One of the methods used to get inflated 'illiteracy' statistics is to present less-educated people with a passage written in bureaucratic language and ask them to explain what it means. Some PhD's would fail such a test. Einstein had someone else do his income taxes for him.

Media people cannot all be statisticians. But they can at least know that they are not statisticians — and not be so quick to grab a number and run with it. They can understand that often the most important thing about a number is its origin.

The real danger from incessant and reckless crusades is not that some wrong policies will be followed here and there. Countries can survive bad policies; otherwise there would be no countries still surviving today. The far greater danger is the steady drumbeat of demoralising and false assertions, proclaiming disaster after disaster in the most basic institutions of society, serving the most important material and human needs. Crying 'wolf' used to be an irresponsible act of individuals. Today, it is a flourishing industry — one heavily subsidised with tax money.

### **The Effectiveness of Institutions**

In addition to de-legitimising institutions that are functioning properly, those with the unconstrained vision often also create very real malfunctions in institutions. Where no inherent limitations are taken into account, every unhappy aspect of every trade-off becomes a basis for a crusade for a 'solution'. Moreover, no matter how counter-productive this 'solution' turns

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out to be in practice, any problems it creates can be viewed as new and unrelated, or as showing that the 'solution' was simply not carried far enough. On a wide range of disparate issues, a pattern has emerged — a pattern that can be broken down into four stages:

- Stage 1: Some situation exists whose negative aspects some group wants to eliminate. Such a situation is routinely called a 'crisis'.
- Stage 2: Policies are advocated to end the 'crisis'. Advocates claim that these policies will lead to beneficial result A. Critics say that these policies will lead to detrimental result Z. The latter claims are dismissed as absurd and impossible, if not also dishonest.
- Stage 3: The policies are instituted and lead to detrimental result Z.
- Stage 4: Those who say that detrimental result Z is due to the policies are dismissed as 'simplistic', and the burden of proof is put on them to demonstrate to an absolute certainty that these policies alone were the only possible cause of the results. No burden of proof whatever is put on those who had so confidently predicted the opposite result.

Examples of this pattern abound. Let me examine just three.

Back in the 1960s, the number of Americans whose incomes were so low that they were kept out of poverty only by dependence on payments from the government was relatively low — and falling. Yet there was still poverty. This was the 'crisis' or stage 1.

Stage 2: President Lyndon Johnson launched the 'war on poverty' programs to enable people to become self-supporting through retraining and other programs. Critics claimed that this would only create more dependence on government but this was dismissed by 'war on poverty' supporters, who emphasised that its whole purpose was to end handouts; 'Give a hand, not a handout' was their slogan and President Johnson proclaimed, 'The days of the dole are numbered'.

Stage 3: After many years and many billions of dollars, the proportion of the American people unable — or unwilling — to support themselves above the poverty level without government payments increased.

Stage 4: Rising poverty has become a new alarm spread by the same people who supported the 'war on poverty' programs — and is used to argue for new programs along the same lines.

The so-called 'sex education' crusade has exhibited the same pattern. Back in the late 1950s American teenage pregnancy had been declining for several years. Still, it had not entirely disappeared and there were many personal tragedies involved.

Stage 1: The 'solution' proposed was to introduce sex education into the



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public schools, letting the 'experts' replace the family as the guide to young people's sexual behaviour. Among the promised benefits were a reduction in teenage pregnancy, consequently a reduction in abortions and a reduction in venereal disease.

Stage 2: During the 1960s sex education began to be introduced in American schools on a massive basis.

Stage 3: The previous decline in teenage pregnancy not only halted but reversed — and skyrocketed to record levels, several times higher than before. Abortions and venereal disease also skyrocketed to record levels.

Stage 4: The present record levels of all these problems is almost universally assumed to demonstrate the desperate need for more sex education programs in the schools. Anyone who suggests that the present situation is in any way due to the previous sex education programs is of course dismissed out of hand.

A final example of this pattern is crime in America.

Stage 1: As of the 1950s, the murder rate in leading American cities had been declining for more than two decades. Still, there were many individual tragedies from this and other violent crimes. Those with the unconstrained vision had the solution: Get at the 'root causes' of crime — poverty, unemployment, and other social ills, including 'the inhumanity of our prisons'. Make the whole criminal justice system more humane, with new legal rights for the accused.

Stage 2: Partly through legislation, but mostly through Supreme Court decisions, a sweeping new array of rights were created for criminal defendants and convicted prisoners. Sweeping social programs at the same time gave much larger sums of money to those in poverty and those suffering unemployment.

Stage 3: Crime rates more than doubled within the decade of the 1960s. These included murder rates, which reversed a long decline and doubled from 1963 to 1971. The increase was especially striking among juvenile criminals, whom the new legal reforms favoured especially. The number of murders committed by 16-year-olds tripled in four years in New York City. Some street gangs made it a policy to have their murders committed by their youngest members, who were least likely to receive serious punishment.

Stage 4: Anyone who calls for tightening up the laws against criminals is dismissed as 'simplistic' and out of date, since 'everybody knows' that what we need to do is get at the social 'root causes' of crime.

### III. THE EXTERNAL DANGERS

The external threat to freedom and the internal threat are not completely unrelated. They are both related to the unconstrained vision of man. Moreover, the undermining of the institutions of a free society and the demoralisation of a free people cannot help affecting the confidence and zeal

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with which they are prepared to defend themselves — or the resignation with which some are willing to accept other systems that seem only marginally different from what they have.

This is an especially appropriate time to talk about external threats to freedom. Exactly half a century ago today — on September 29, 1938 — the Western democracies committed their greatest blunder of the 20th century at Munich. The Munich agreement, intended by British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain to produce ‘peace in our time’, in fact set the stage for World War II, in which 40 million people lost their lives. Western democracies themselves narrowly escaped being destroyed. Though the Western allies in the end won convincingly, for the first two and a half years of the war, they suffered one swift, crushing, and humiliating defeat after another, both in Europe and in the Pacific.

France collapsed in only six weeks of fighting. Other ancient and proud nations of Europe fell after only a few weeks, or even days, of fighting against the lightning warfare (*blitzkrieg*) of Hitler’s war machine. Britain was expected to fall at any moment.

In the Pacific, after only a few hours of bombing, more than half the battleships of the American Pacific fleet lay at the bottom of Pearl Harbor. Over the next few months, Japan’s war machine won victory after shocking victory — taking the Philippines, Singapore, and penetrating swiftly as far south as New Guinea.

These events did not go unnoticed in Australia. No one seemed to have been morally ambivalent because the Australian government possessed the terrible weapons of modern warfare. But many were worried that Australia might not possess enough of these weapons to ensure its survival as a free nation.

Many histories and motion pictures have told the story of how the West came back from its desperate predicament to win in the end. What has been neglected is the story of how the West got into such a predicament in the first place. This story is of more than historical interest, because it was attitudes rather than circumstances that led the West so close to destruction. Those attitudes — and the vision behind them — are flourishing in the West at this moment.

On the eve of World War II, during the decade of the 1930s, the constrained and the unconstrained visions of war and peace struggled for supremacy in the Western democracies and the unconstrained vision won overwhelmingly.

Back in the 18th century, Edmund Burke said that there is no security for honest men except by believing the worst about evil men. That is what the unconstrained vision cannot do. Its emphasis on the so-called ‘root causes’ of crime, for example, reflects on unwillingness to face the brutal fact that individuals may choose — knowingly and even calculatingly — to do deliberate evil, with the full awareness that it is evil.

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In international relations, both in the 1930s and today, the unconstrained vision sees war as so counter-productive for all concerned that it must be a consequence of misunderstandings, emotional reactions, or the mindless psychology of an 'arms race'. Given this, international negotiations and weapons reductions are the way to avoid war. These views and this vision dominated the thinking and the policies of the Western world during the 1930s. Everything that is being advocated by the so-called 'peace movement' today was tried then. They led to the bloodiest war in history.

During the 1930s, the entire Western world was seized with the unconstrained vision of peace, in desperate hopes of avoiding a repetition of the horrors of World War I, much as we are today desperate to avoid the horrors of another Vietnam. There is no question that the intentions were good in both cases. It is the consequences that need examining.

Those who saw the greatest dangers to be in the dreadful weapons of modern warfare were able to get a series of treaties limiting military and naval weapons, beginning in the 1920s and continuing on up to the eve of the Second World War. Unilateral military reductions in the West supplemented these treaties. Britain, France, and the United States all cut their military budgets substantially, during the early to mid-1930s. The US Army's budget was cut in half in just one year, so that the money saved could be spent on the social programs of the New Deal. The American Army became only the sixteenth largest army in the world — right after Spain and Portugal.

Even this small remnant of an army did not have enough military equipment. American soldiers trained with wooden rifles and wooden substitutes for tanks and artillery, because there were not enough real rifles, real tanks, and real artillery weapons to go around. Those who believe in avoiding an arms race should study the history of the 1930s, to see the classic example of avoiding an arms race. Then they should study the history of the outbreak of World War II at the end of that decade, to see what the consequences are.

The West was not militarily weak because it had to be but because it chose to be. And it chose to be because its prevailing vision said that armaments increased the chances of war and international agreements increased the chances of peace. The period leading up to World War II is littered with international treaties for peace: the Kellogg-Briand Pact, the Washington Naval Agreement, and the Locarno Treaty, among others, in the 1920s and a similar series of treaties in the 1930s, culminating in the Munich agreement 50 years ago today. These treaties were seen as a substitute for armaments by those who thought ideologically. To more pragmatic politicians, pieces of paper were cheaper than military weapons, and did more to enhance your image as a man of peace.

Throughout this whole period, the Western powers had greater industrial capacity — and therefore greater military potential — than Germany, Japan and Italy combined. Moreover, the leaders of the Western democracies

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knew that Germany and Japan especially were arming themselves at a rate exceeding any conceivable need for defence. Why did Western leaders do so little to counter these mortal threats? British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin perhaps explained it best in 1936, when he stated why he had not alerted the country to its dangers during the 1933 election campaign:

Suppose I had gone to the country and said that Germany was rearming, and that we must rearm, does anybody think that this pacific democracy would have rallied to that cry at that movement?

Politically, Baldwin was no doubt right. Historically, he was tragically wrong, and millions paid with their lives for his political sagacity. In a larger sense, millions died because the pacifism rampant in the West during the two decades following the First World War made it politically unfeasible to build up sufficient military forces to deter the Second World War.

Not everyone shared this vision. One of those who did not was a lonely back bencher in Britain's House of Commons named Winston Churchill. It was not just that Churchill read the events of the times more correctly than Chamberlain. More fundamentally, Churchill started with an entirely different vision of the world.

In the constrained vision, it is not war that needs explaining, but peace. According to the Federalists, 'nations in general will make war whenever they have a prospect of getting anything by it'. This was the constrained vision of man at its bluntest. In this vision, the challenge was to make it too risky for anybody to attack you. According to Churchill, war can be avoided 'only by the accumulation of deterrents against the aggressor'. In 1934, five years before the Second World War began, Churchill warned: 'False ideas have been spread about the country that disarmament means peace.' Just as believers in the constrained vision advocate checks and balances in government, so they advocate maintaining an international balance of military weapons, so as to check the actions of potential aggressors.

In this framework, weakness on the part of a major power risks war, not only for that power, but also for all the other nations depending on international checks and balances to maintain peace. In the 1930s, Churchill warned: 'Britain's hour of weakness is Europe's hour of danger.' If anything, this was an understatement. The dangers reached around the world. That remains true today.

Our times are, of course, different — but the differences give little basis for comfort. In a nuclear age, you cannot lose a war for two and a half years and still expect to win — or even to survive. In a nuclear age, war must be deterred because it is not even worth winning. Today, as fifty years ago, the West has every industrial and technological capacity to deter any aggressor or any combination of aggressors. The only question is whether our vision will let us do it.

# Closing Remarks

Professor Wolfgang Kasper  
University College  
Australian Defence Force Academy

Professor Sowell, distinguished guests, dear friends and colleagues in the study of the vision of man. Today is a very memorable, and I dare say, festive day: the Navy is in town, Flo Jo ran a world record, and now Thomas Sowell has marvellously deflated the 'professional crusaders' in a world class lecture, and I thank him very much for it.

It would be very tempting for me — but presumptuous — to offer my own still half-baked first reactions to this truly seminal and inspiring lecture. Instead I want to tell you about a situation of 'Collectivism and Repression Endangered', in which Professor Sowell, unbeknown to him so far, played a key role: A few years ago, I was in China at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. As you know, amazing things are happening in China; they have privatised the livelihood of 600 million peasants, and they now run courses on Adam Smithian economics. I was taken to their library, which had a very good collection of Western books. Their librarian told me that only a few books were considered too dangerous to be made accessible to advanced students. These were locked away in what he called a 'poison cupboard'. That of course made me truly curious. I asked what the latest acquisition was that had gone into that 'poison cupboard', and the wizened old librarian proudly produced a book, elegantly imprinted 'Marxism' — by Thomas Sowell.

I've read the book since and I can tell you — if another commercial is permitted — that the man who gives such excellent lectures also writes some very excellent books.

I thank you very much, Thomas Sowell, for your humour and your thought-provoking words. I thank you for the outstanding and challenging intellectual feast to which you have treated us. And I am sure that all my fellow guests are waiting to support me in offering a hand to express the appreciation for what you have done for us tonight. Thank you very much.

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# Endangered Freedom

Thomas Sowell

In the fifth John Bonython Lecture, Thomas Sowell argues that public life in Western countries is blighted by an 'unconstrained vision' of man and society. This vision treats all social evils as curable: all we need is knowledge of their 'root causes' and the will to adopt the appropriate public policies. In reality, such efforts usually worsen the problems they are meant to solve. But these failures typically form the basis of demands for yet more public money to be spent on investigating and curing them. This futile social activism leads eventually to widespread demoralisation and reduces the legitimacy and effectiveness of social institutions.

The 'constrained vision', in contrast, accepts that evil is an ineradicable ingredient of the human condition. It recognises that the best that can be done is to contain and limit social problems by traditional means, including, where appropriate, punishment and deterrence. Nowhere is this approach more urgently needed than in the search for world peace. The prevailing belief that peace can be secured by disarmament and international treaties stems from an 'unconstrained vision' of human nature and risks repeating the disastrous policies of pacifism and appeasement followed by the democracies in the 1930s.

**Thomas Sowell** has been a Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University since 1980. A graduate of Harvard University, he obtained his doctorate from the University of Chicago in 1968. During the 1970s he taught economics at UCLA, served as Project Director at The Urban Institute, Washington D.C., and was a Fellow of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford. In recent years he has become established as an authority on the political economy of race relations and on public policy towards minorities generally. His most recent book, *A Conflict of Visions*, was published in 1987.

The **John Bonython Lecture Series** was inaugurated by the Centre for Independent Studies in 1984 to honour the founding Chairman of its Board of Trustees. Each year the Centre sponsors a lecture to examine the relationship between individuals and the economic, social and political factors that make up a free society. The lectures are published as part of the Occasional Papers series.

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