



Dazzled by Murray N. Rothbard

Guglielmo Piombini

I was born in Bologna, Italy, in 1968. My father was a culture enthusiast with conservative views, who had a huge library of books at home, including the works of leading classical liberal thinkers such as Ludwig von Mises, F.A. Hayek, Milton Friedman, and Luigi Einaudi. I read them when I was young and found them compelling. Until I was 20, I considered myself a classical liberal, or rather an anti-communist conservative. The political figures I admired most were Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. At school I used to have long discussions with my peers, the vast majority of whom were socialists or leftists. I often had the better of them, but there were some aspects of the political positions I defended that did not quite convince me. Exactly what, however, I could not explain.

Then, in the early 1990s, my father brought home a book by the French classical liberal journalist Guy Sorman: *I veri pensatori del nostro tempo* (or, in English translation, *Freedom on Bail: The Real Thinkers of the Twentieth Century*). The author interviewed a number of great thinkers, including Hayek, Karl Popper, and Isaiah Berlin, as well as a “libertarian”

G. Piombini (✉)
Libreria del Ponte, Bologna, Italy
e-mail: g.piombini@tiscalinet.it

thinker who was unknown to me: Murray N. Rothbard. That wonderful interview, titled “The State is Theft!,” overwhelmed me. The anarcho-capitalist theory expounded by Rothbard made me dizzy. I had never read or thought of anything like it. His 100% pro-free-market position, even in typically state-run sectors such as protection, justice, money, or roads, left me speechless. His definition of the State as a “vast criminal organization” shocked me. After reading Rothbard’s interview in its entirety, I said to myself, “Here, these are my ideas. I feel that way, too. I, too, am a libertarian!” My political doubts had vanished: I had become, overnight, a true libertarian believer, and have remained so to this day.

I wanted to learn more about libertarian thought, and ordered through a bookstore two books, *For a New Liberty* by Murray N. Rothbard and *The Machinery of Freedom* by David D. Friedman. At that time ordering books abroad was a complex affair, and they took two or three months to arrive from the United States. When they arrived I read them with enthusiasm. In the meantime, I had met a handful of friends with libertarian ideas, great scholars: Carlo Lottieri, Luigi Marco Bassani, Alessandro Vitale, and Nicola Iannello, who in later years were joined by others, such as Alberto Mingardi and Leonardo Facco. Together, we decided to spread libertarian and anarcho-capitalist thought in Italy, which in the mid-1990s was still virtually unknown.

We did a lot of work, publishing for many years a monthly magazine (*Enclave. Rivista Libertaria*, Leonardo Facco Editore), editing books, writing articles, organizing conferences. Carlo Lottieri and I wrote in 1996 the first book ever published in Italy on free market environmentalism, *Privatizziamo il chiaro di luna! Le ragioni dell'ecologia di mercato* (Let’s Privatize Moonlight! The Reasons for Market Ecology). Aldo Canovari’s Liberilibri publishing house also began to publish Italian translations of works by the major exponents of libertarian thought: Murray N. Rothbard, Walter Block, Hans-Hermann Hoppe, Ayn Rand, Albert Jay Nock, and others. Our friend Leonardo Facco’s publishing house also published texts by Rothbard, Hoppe, Rand, and Frédéric Bastiat. In the following years, also thanks to our pioneering work, the number of Italian libertarians increased significantly.

I have written and published several books, including *Il Medioevo delle libertà* (The Middle Ages of Liberty) on the libertarian aspects of the Middle Ages, *L’epopea libertaria del Far West* (The Libertarian Epic of the Far West) on the Old American West as an example of anarcho-capitalism, and *50 Classici del pensiero liberale e libertario* (50 Classics of Classical

Liberal and Libertarian Thought), a 400+ page volume summarizing the contents of 50 important works of classical liberalism and libertarianism. My most recent book is *La Croce contro il Leviatano. Perché il Cristianesimo può salvarci dallo Stato onnipotente* (The Cross against Leviathan. Why Christianity Can Save Us from the Omnipotent State).

Libertarian thought changed my life because, to this day, I am still dedicated to its dissemination as an essayist, book author, publisher (Tramedoro Edizioni), and bookseller. Without this passion for libertarianism perhaps I would have pursued another profession, for example, as a lawyer, since I do have a law degree. Instead, for almost 30 years I have happily run a bookstore (www.libriadielponte.com) that has a section specializing in classical liberal and libertarian thought.