

Mark Crovelli

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While most of my friends would find it difficult to imagine today, I have not always been a loudmouthed, pain-in-the-ass, libertarian anarchist. In fact, if you asked my friends from high school whether they ever agreed with anything Mark Crovelli ever said, I imagine that more than a few of them would say that they did. By contrast, if you polled my current friends about their feelings about what Mark Crovelli the anarchist thinks, you'd be lucky to find two that will vouch for my sanity.

Looking back on my transformation into a libertarian anarchist, I find it almost miraculous that it ever could have occurred. I was raised Catholic by my mother (my father having converted to Hinduism), and, until relatively recently, I was fanatically devoted to the Catholic Church. I was so devoted to the Church, in fact, that I very seriously considered becoming a priest during my freshman year of college.

As far as my political thinking was concerned back then, I was like many Catholics in that I only cared about the issue of abortion. I knew almost nothing about economics, history, or anything else for that matter, but I knew that I vehemently objected to abortion. It was that hatred of abortion that urged me to study political science as an undergraduate, in the naive hope that such a degree would allow me to fight for the pro-life cause.

Since I viewed my study of political science as a vocation of sorts, I never wavered or doubted that political science was the subject I should be studying. I did not take well to my classes, however. I did well in terms of my grades, but I found everything that political scientists claimed to be studying completely mind-numbing. I still do.

At some point during my junior year of college, however, I had a small epiphany. I was taking an especially mind-numbing class about law, and one of the assigned readings was a short excerpt from a book entitled *Law, Legislation and Liberty* by F.A. Hayek (I forget which volume). When it came time to discuss the reading in class, which I had luckily read the night before, I was shocked to witness the Professor completely misinterpreting Hayek's words. I had found Hayek extremely difficult to read, but I could plainly see that my professor was completely butchering what Hayek had written.

This incident led me to search out more of Hayek's works, because I had agreed with what

he had written in the small excerpt I had read. The only book I was able to find in the local bookstore was his extremely dense little book *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism*, which I promptly purchased and read. I found the book almost excruciatingly difficult to read, but I completely agreed with the parts that I fully understood. The long list of Hayek's other publications on the cover of *The Fatal Conceit* prompted me to try to hunt down some more of his books in the school library.

The section of the library where Hayek's books were located absolutely fascinated me. I didn't know any of the authors, but almost every book had the word "liberty" in the title. I checked out several of them that day, including a small, blue, wear-worn book entitled *The Ethics of Liberty* by Murray N. Rothbard.

Rothbard's book turned me into a full-blown libertarian anarchist within two weeks. I didn't even read any of the other books that I checked out that day. I just kept reading and rereading Rothbard's book for a full two weeks.

Try as I might, I could not help but agree with Rothbard's logic. As a Catholic I was already committed to the idea that stealing is wrong, so how could I morally consent to taxation if taxation is really nothing but stealing? The clarity and force of Rothbard's writing left me with no other option other than to declare taxation a form of robbery. As far as I was concerned, (and I still believe this), the fact that I was forced to concede that taxation is nothing but robbery was all that was needed to make me an anarchist. The rest of the book filled in the gaps to make me a consistent libertarian anarchist.

My Rothbardian awakening led me to start searching for more about Murray Rothbard online. I soon found the Ludwig von Mises Institute's website and eagerly delved into their vast library of audio lectures (there were few videos way back in 2001). This was followed by a scholarship to attend a conference at the Mises Institute within a few months.

That, in a nutshell, is how I became a libertarian anarchist. Or, put differently for those of my friends who doubt my sanity, that is how I came to lose my mind. I suppose the take away message is this: Beware of reading anything by Murray Rothbard unless you are prepared to have every political belief you cherish shattered into tiny pieces.