

## Introduction on Yascha Mounk by Casper Thomas

Yascha Mounk is one of the great political thinkers of his generation, the generation born in the final years of the Cold War and the Iron Curtain. This is the generation that was intellectually formed by the world that came thereafter: a world of triumphant globalization, with a strong American pedigree.

This was a world of increasing European integration, changing the face of Mounk's country of birth, Germany, and the European continent as a whole. Underpinning all this was a hope - or was it an assumption? - that slowly but surely, the world would transform into a global liberal democracy.

In his work, Yascha has always proven to be a critical counterpoint to common assumptions of these times. His first, strongly autobiographical book, titled *Stranger in My Own Country*, showed how little room existed for Jewish identity in the Germany he grew up in. One of the questions I have for Yascha is to what extent these experiences form the basis for the book he presents today, *The Great Experiment. Why diverse democracies fall apart and how they can endure*.

Yascha followed up with a great work on the new ethic of the welfare state. In *The Age of Responsibility*, he outlines how notions of collective risk and shared burden have been replaced by the assumption that even in a welfare state, each individual is wholly responsible for his own success and failures. This line of neoliberal thought, developed in the Anglo-Saxon world, eagerly embraced in Europe, in the end proved to be a lethal blow to social democracy.

His previous book, *The People vs Democracy*, dealt with what is maybe the largest political question of this time: the struggle between liberal democracy and its illiberal and authoritarian challengers, mainly of the far right.

The end of history that he grew up in, quickly restarted with this ongoing political struggle. By outlining what makes democracies vulnerable to the temptations of autocracy, Yascha Mounk points us in the direction of how liberal democracy can be saved.

This is Yascha Mounk's mission: fortifying democracy against its many threats and internal weaknesses. He carries this task in various roles – as a political scientist at Johns Hopkins University, as a contributor to publications such as *The Atlantic* and *Foreign Affairs*. He does so with the demeanour of a classic liberal: by emphasising the need for debate and exchange of ideas, between like-minded people and between adversaries. Yascha believes in the art of persuasion through argument, which is rare these days. His digital ideas platform, founded in the summer of 2020, also carries this name: *Persuasion*.

The idea Yascha wants to persuade us of now is that multicultural societies can not only be made to work, but to work *well* and are something to aspire to.

Over the last years, many western democracies seem to have given up on this ideal, the Netherlands included. The idea that a democracy can offer its fruits to a great variety of people has for many been replaced with the conviction that multiculturalism is a 'drama'.

The political landscape has shifted accordingly, with the far right carrying a substantive chunk of the electorate by proclaiming multiculturalism as an assault on society.

Yascha Mounk is the person to strike back, by not leaving the field to those who believe multiculturalism is doomed to fail. Today, and in his book, he outlines the foundations that any democracy needs to make diversity work. Also in this Yascha is a rare voice: one of political optimism.