against such petty irritants, which when taken up by agencies of the state reflect what Minogue sees as a deeper paradox, namely that in modern democracies, ‘rulers are elected by citizens, but treat those citizens as if they were stupid’.

There is a great deal of political life that Minogue does not attempt to cover. This is very much an introduction to politics in the West, and those interested in the East, or the Third World, or in the dynamics of transition from communism to other systems of rule, will need to look elsewhere. It goes without saying, however, that had Minogue sought to cover all these areas, Politics: A Very Short Introduction might well have merited the title Politics: A Very Long Introduction—and to produce such a book was avowedly not his task. Within the limits imposed by his task, Minogue has written a book of great value.

Reviewed by William Maley,
Senior Lecturer in Politics,
University of New South Wales, ADFA Campus.

Tunnel Vision: The failure of political imagination
by James Walter,
Allen & Unwin,
St Leonards, 1996, 152pp.,

Recently I was involved in a formal debate against the Australian Republican Movement on the question of whether Australia should become a republic. Our side went to a great deal of trouble to discuss issues regarding the constitution, citizenship and the nature of republicanism. The republican side did not worry about such matters, they spent their time denigrating the royal family, prattling on about nationalism and national identity and arguing that Australia should follow the example of such republics (sic) as Canada. Their objective was to keep the message simple, appeal to the emotions of the audience and avoid any of the important constitutional issues.

I recount this story because James Walter in Tunnel Vision argues that republicanism may be the answer to what he sees as the ‘tunnel vision’ of contemporary political discussion in Australia. He seems to identify this tunnel vision with one particular form of political discussion, that is economic rationalism. The truth is, however, that tunnel vision is a mode of looking at the world that can affect any political outlook. Most certainly a very large part of the Republican movement in Australia, in particular that part associated with the Australian Republican Movement advocating the so-called minimalist position, suffers from ‘tunnel vision’. Their objective is to simplify and to avoid the discussion of complex issues on the basis that the republic is inevitable. Equally there are some economic rationalists who suffer from tunnel vision, but there are also economic rationalists who recognise that what they are involved in are discussions regarding the nature of the ‘good society’. In other words any intellectual/public movement works at a variety of levels from the simplistic to the sophisticated, and it is simply wrong to make one particular movement into a scapegoat onto which the sins of all are heaped.

It most certainly is possible to argue that tunnel vision has a long history in Australia. Walter singles out Francis Fukuyama and his ‘end of history’ thesis as a source of contemporary tunnel vision. It has not been noted that one hundred years ago a former Victorian Minister for Education, Charles Henry Pearson, also argued an ‘end of history’ thesis in his book National Life and Character. There are many similarities between Fukuyama and Pearson, but there is one major difference. Pearson thought that what he termed ‘state socialism’ lay at the end of the road of history. Two of the major architects of the Australian Settlement, Alfred Deakin and H. B. Higgins, were former students of Pearson. Here we can indeed argue that the tunnel vision of Pearson was handed on to the Protectionist liberals of the day. They could put up the protectionists walls around Australia because they knew that waiting at the end of history was a self-enclosed state practising state socialism and seeking as little contact with the rest of the world as possible. Free trade liberals suddenly found that they belonged to the past and not to the future. They were stigmatised as immoral, and their ideas excluded from serious public debate.

Of course what has happened during the past twenty years is that the inevitability of state socialism as the end of history has been revealed as a fraud. Free trade has made a come-
back and the pro-statist protectionists have been successfully challenged and forced to concede ground in the public arena. The protectionists have not given up without a fight as the savage attacks on the hated economic rationalism during the late 1980s and 1990s indicate. The only problem is that many of these attacks owe more to moral fervour than reasoned argument, and are the product of an earlier tunnel vision dating back to Pearson and his Protectionist disciples.

Tunnel vision then did not begin in the 1980s, nor is it a sin peculiar to economic rationalists. Rather it should be viewed as a structural problem of Australian intellectual and public life. On this question I agree wholeheartedly with Walter when he says that we need more reasoned debate on public matters. There has been a tendency for Australian intellectual life to operate at the level of simplistic ideological point scoring. I believe that there are a number of reasons for this deficiency in Australian intellectual life. The first is the prevalence of a form of tribalism under which aspiring writers and thinkers are forced to join either of the two major tribes of Left or Right if they wish to be published. This situation has traditionally not done much to encourage new and original thinking. The second is that Australian culture in general places far too much emphasis on harmony and unity. There are complex historical reasons for this development, but it would be true to say that the victory of White Australia and protectionism at the beginning of this century entrenched these values in Australian culture. Consequently vigorous public debate is frowned on as 'not nice', and many Australians, including Australian intellectuals, have trouble distinguishing between free and frank discussion on the one hand and abuse on the other.

The third reason derives from the dominance of sentiment in Australian intellectual life. George Shaw has argued that the Left in Australia has been largely sentimental in its approach to intellectual matters, supporting positions and issues on the basis of moral feeling. Vigorous intellectuality has been a feature more of the Australian Right, from John Anderson to James McCauley to B. A. Santamaria and P. P. McGuinness. Nevertheless Australian intellectual life since World War II has been dominated by the Left, a Left that has tended to rely on feeling as the final arbiter. Also the Left, in particular the Melbourne Left, has generally been more concerned with the political consequences of ideas than with the ideas themselves. This has led to an extraordinary philistinism amongst large sections of the Australian intelligentsia, who should be more rightly considered as technicians of ideas than as lovers of ideas.

Tunnel vision is a real problem in Australian intellectual life, but it has little to do with the influence of Fukuyama or economic rationalism. It has a lot to do with the nature of the Australian intelligentsia and its failure to take ideas seriously and to adopt an intellectually rigorous approach. One of the ironies here is that it is amongst advocates of economic rationalism that is to be found one of the few groups of Australian intellectuals who attempt to develop a rigorous intellectual approach. It is a pity that the republicans cannot go beyond appeals to nationalist sentiment and recognise that there are important intellectual issues at stake in the republican debate.

Reviewed by Greg Melleuish.
Dr Melleuish’s most recent book is Cultural Liberalism in Australia, Cambridge University Press.

On the Cards: Privacy, identity and trust in the age of smart technologies
by Perri 6 and Ivan Briscoe

On the Cards is a relatively short text published by Demos, an independent think-tank based in the United Kingdom that focuses on radical solutions to long-term problems facing the UK and other countries. With this background, On the Cards must be seen as a policy advocacy document as opposed to a scholarly book. It concentrates on the British situation but its conclusions are sufficiently broad to be applicable to other countries.