John Doyle
The World Is A Ball: The Joy, Madness and Meaning of Soccer.
Toronto: Doubleday Canada 2010.
410 pages
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CDN$19.95/US$15.95 (paper ISBN 978-0-385-66499-8)

Ted Richards, ed.
Soccer and Philosophy: Beautiful Thoughts on the Beautiful Game.
Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing 2010.
416 pages
US$21.95 (paper ISBN 978-0-8126-9676-9)

John Doyle is the television critic for a Canadian national newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*. He writes with wit and detached amusement/amazement/despair (as deemed appropriate) not only about the day's shows but about trends in the industry generally. He is also a football nut. He persuaded the newspaper to let him cover the three World Cups and two European Football Championships of the past decade, as a fan and cultural commentator in addition to rather than instead of the paper's regular sports commentator. *The World Is A Ball* is not a mere compilation of columns, but as the cover blurb rightly says a combination of travelogue, match reporting and social history. It is a very entertaining read.

Soccer and Philosophy is an anthology of thirty-one essays averaging around fifteen pages in length. The authors are mostly professors or graduate students of philosophy, with some representation from communication studies, law, computer science and other fields, 'very bright and intelligent folk—people who know their philosophy—writing passionately about the game they love', to quote editor Richards' introduction. I did not find it to be an entertaining read.

Many themes are common to both books: the way that football at its best is a combination of formal elegance and expressive beauty; the destructive ugliness of the game at its worst; the way that the game, especially the World Cup, has become in the last few decades a global cultural phenomenon of astonishing proportions; the way that football fans all over the worlds share something that has the capacity to unite them in the face of linguistic and cultural differences (football as a kind of Esperanto, in the suggestive image of Doyle and others); the barely concealed global political sub-text of many international matches—former colonies beating their erstwhile rulers, the Cold War by other means, and so forth; the ethical ambiguities of the so-called professional foul. The questions therefore can legitimately be asked, where the difference lies between the two volumes, and (pointedly) where the added value is in the claimed relationship to philosophy.

Doyle offers insights and sudden vistas, but no theories or reasonings: his work is journalism—intelligent and reflective journalism, but still journalism. In *Soccer and Philosophy*, by contrast, we are told that if Nietzsche had been a football fan, he would have supported Arsenal; that football would have been Aristotle's favorite sport since he was very interested in goals; that there have in recent times been many outstanding players, both men and women, who could serve as the Platonic form of the football player; that support for Aston Villa meets valid standards of rationality; that the moment of taking a penalty kick is a moment of Kierkegaardian Spirit; that the loneliness of the referee is an opportunity for Sartrean anguish or Sartrean authenticity. We can read discussions on whether Kantian disinterest is the appropriate mode of apprehension for football; on whether the position of the referee in football is best theorized by natural law theory, by Hobbesian or Rawlsian contractarianism, by John Austin's theory of laws as commands of the sovereign, Hart's theory of laws as social rules, or Holmes's legal realism (all this in four pages, which gives some idea of the depth and sophistication of the analysis). And so on. The book reminds me of the early days of the law and literature movement in legal theory, when law journals were full of law professors publishing their critical readings of this or that poem, novel, play, movie…all designed to do little except show to other law professors and anyone who might be interested that really law professors *were* intellectuals and not just trade-school instructors. Here it is philosophers showing themselves to be real people, not intellectuals, or so one might judge.

I find it hard to imagine the audience for this book. Certainly, nothing of an intellectually interesting kind flows from football to philosophy. We learn nothing about the issue of so-called dirty hands in ethics from being told that the player deciding to foul to prevent a goal is an instance of this problem. As philosophy, the book offers little. And I would be willing to bet large sums of money that the average football supporter outside the academy would find the texts to be pompous pointy-headed pretentiousness. The only people I can imagine reading the book are the contributors actual or would-be. Perhaps at a stretch it might serve as a hook into the problems of philosophy for students who know something about football, rather in the way, for example, that the *Star Trek* transporter provides a hook into issues of Parfitean personal identity. But the transporter succeeds as a hook because it is vivid, concrete and immediate. The essays in *Soccer and Philosophy* are none of those things.

I have, I suppose, much the same credentials as the authors of these essays—a professional academic philosopher; an active college, university and senior league football player for twenty-odd years; still a supporter of the team my brother and I grew up watching in London, England, in the 1950s. I am ready to stand there, pint in hand, and debate the sad state of English football with anyone who cares to listen. But, just in case it is not already clear, *Soccer and Philosophy* is not my thing. Yes, it is important for philosophy, especially the normative and applied areas of philosophy, to be relevant to the real world—to actual people and societies and their actual problems. But the heavy lifting for such relevance, in my view, needs to be done inside the academy and is a job for the best minds the academy can offer. If those minds eschew it, their bad. You don't make philosophy relevant to popular culture just by publishing books on philosophy and popular culture. No doubt I will be accused of being an ivory-tower elitist: so be it. But

then what do I know? This volume is no. 51 in the Popular Culture and Philosophy series, so someone must buy them.

Dreadfully sorry—I have to go now: it's time for *Fox Soccer Report*...

Roger A. Shiner
University of British Columbia Okanagan, and Okanagan College