

KUDOS, SEGMENTS, AND HEATMAPS: SEEKING A MEANINGFUL LIFE USING STRAVA

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ABSTRACT *The development and utilization of social media apps creates both opportunities and challenges for users, a phenomenon that includes the endurance sport community. The Strava app, launched in 2009, has grown in popularity to approximately 100 million users as of March 2024. At times referred to as social media for endurance athletes, Strava illustrates a specific form of virtual communication worthy of examination. In this paper the aims are to: 1) describe the app features and its impact on users, both the benefits and the challenges; 2) explore a number of ethical issues associated with using Strava. Methods include a philosophical approach with a particular focus on the American philosophical tradition (e.g., Henry David Thoreau, William James, Henry Bugbee), along with first-person accounts of using Strava for running and swimming workouts.*

KEY WORDS

ENDURANCE SPORT, SOCIAL MEDIA, PHILOSOPHY, ETHICS, EXPERIENCE

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INTRODUCTION

During the summer of 2023, I took advantage of a US holiday (July 4) and spent a portion of the morning running on one of my favorite trails. Starting near a stream at 1348 feet (411 meters), I made my way up Madison Run Road trail to the top, after 5 miles (8 km) and climbing to almost 2600 feet (792m). Before turning around, I paused my smart watch, caught my breath briefly, hit “Resume” and made my way back down the trail. As I glanced at my watch, partway down the mountain, the splits seemed off. What happened? I knew the device was not accurately measuring my effort or workout; my pace felt significantly faster than the watch indicated. I instantly wondered, what would people on Strava – my social media app of choice for running – think? At the bottom of the mountain, my watch showed just over 9 miles (14km) instead of over 10 miles (16km). After saving the workout, I modified the Strava entry to explain the data error writing, “Paused watch at the top and it must have lost signal, pretty wacky splits on the way down. Should be 10.3 overall.”

The development and utilization of social media apps like Strava creates both opportunities and challenges for users, a phenomenon that includes the endurance sport community. The Strava app, launched in 2009, has grown in popularity to approximately 100 million users as of March 2024 (Strava.com, 2024). At times referred to as social media for endurance athletes, Strava illustrates a specific form of virtual communication worthy of examination. In this paper, my aims are to: 1) describe the app features and its impact on users, both the benefits and the challenges; 2) explore certain ethical issues associated with using Strava. Methods include a philosophical approach with a particular focus on the American philosophical tradition (e.g., Henry David Thoreau, William James, Henry Bugbee), along with first-person accounts of using Strava for running and swimming workouts.

BACKGROUND TO SPORT PHILOSOPHY RESEARCH METHODS:

The academic area termed philosophy of sport is a fairly recent strain of research and scholarly pursuit. Its content area resides in the interdisciplinary space between and among both philosophy and kinesiology. Academics in this area tend to be philosophy faculty with an interest in sport, or kinesiology faculty with an interest in philosophy. As in more formal philosophical settings, discussions in the philosophy of sport area range from metaphysics to epistemology to aesthetics and ethics.

Philosophical research is not scientific however it is no less important or valid as compared with the scientific method. In fact, in some cases the philosophic method is more appropriate and important. For example, so-called “super shoes” in running have become a highly debated topic. This footwear, often including technology such as carbon fiber, arguably provides runners with a performance advantage. We now know the answer of the question, “*Can* we develop this technology?” We need a scholarly discipline to answer the question, “*Should* we use this technology?” Philosophical research addresses the “should we” kind of questions.

For philosophers, reflection is a key component of research. In order to understand philosophical questions, in this case ones related to sport and physical activity, it is important to actually engage in those activities and then, when finished, reflect on experience. With my own research related to endurance sport, it behooves me to continue training and racing in order to better understand the endurance sport experiences. Along with experience, philosophical reflection involves thinking about potential connections between sport and philosophical ideas, constructing arguments using critical thinking skills and logic. This research project entails reflecting on endurance sport participation and making connections with American philosophical themes, using critical thinking and logic as part of the process.

METHODOLOGY

One mode of philosophic research is called phenomenology. This kind of research puts a premium on understanding and paying attention to personal experience. In regards to this particular study, this means working to understand the experiences related to endurance sport. American philosopher Henry Bugbee provides an example of the phenomenological approach. Bugbee could have been a kinesiologist instead of a philosopher; he spent his college years on a crew team and wrote about outdoor activities such as walking and hiking. In fact, while in graduate school Bugbee recounted that his ideas took shape “mainly on foot. It was truly peripatetic, engendered not merely while walking, but *through* walking that was essentially a *meditation of the place*” (1999, p. 139). Bugbee participated in sport and then reflected on these moments, drawing from the experiences to help develop his academic ideas.

Bugbee wrote to an audience of philosophers who increasingly sought to eliminate the subjectivity from their work. Bugbee wrote, “Experience ... is not something standing over against us ... from which we are removed to the capacity of observers, about which we are in a position to make assured reports. Experience is our undergoing, our involvement in the world, our lending or withholding of ourselves, keyed to our responsiveness, our sensibility, our alertness or our deadness” (1999, p. 41). Rather than seeking a detached viewpoint, he sought to immerse himself in action and, on reflection, describe the moment in as much detail as possible to help advance his research.

My research interest in endurance sport stems from personal experience. My training and racing ranges from half-marathon to ultramarathon length, both on the roads and on trails; I swim regularly to cross-train. Endurance sport (e.g., running, swimming, cycling) involves unique aspects compared with other sports, especially team sports. In particular, endurance sport involves significant time in motion. This time spent moving may become mundane and even difficult to endure. Famed ultramarathon runner Courtney Dauwalter speaks of going into her “pain cave” in order to excel at her sport (Byerly, 2023). Additionally, the nature of endurance sport is replete with repetition – endless steps, pedal strokes, or swim strokes. Because of the aforementioned qualities, endurance sport lends itself to plenty of time for reflection (Hochstetler, 2022).

Within the philosophy of sport discipline, my own area of study is American philosophy with a particular emphasis on endurance sport. I am keenly interested in thinking about how concepts framed by American philosophers such as Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Dewey, and Williams James, help us think about issues in endurance sport; and, I am interested in how endurance sport might help provide insight into American philosophical concepts and themes. In this way, a topic like the use of Strava for endurance athletes, and the ethical implications of such usage, is of definite interest for me.

The American philosophical tradition views ethics in an expansive manner, as in seeking to answer the question: How should we live? It is important to consider the use of Strava and other social media apps in this manner. Writers within American philosophy take this question seriously. Henry David Thoreau (2012), for example, wrote: "Let us consider the way in which we spend our lives" (p. 594). He addressed this question in the most basic way, starting with the physical location of his abode. For him, this entailed a two-year period living virtually separate from societal life, beside a peaceful pond and within a 150 square foot home. More broadly, Thoreau concerned himself with his personal values and also how this dovetailed with and contributed to societal advancements. The recent Covid-19 pandemic forced us to ask similar existential questions about how we wanted to live; some turned to "tiny houses" or living in vans, some moved to distant locations and worked remotely (sometimes enticed by payment to do so from local communities). In a similar manner, we could ask what these ethical questions regarding how to live mean in terms of work-life balance, or how we should live in terms of exercise, movement and sport. For endurance athletes, this also includes the use of social media apps such as Strava.

One answer to this question of how we should live comes in the form of seeking a life of meaning or significance. This notion became clear to philosopher William James (1899) during his time spent at a retreat center in upstate New York. After days spent listening to engaging speakers, inspiring musical concerts, all within the safe confines of the setting, he realized that he was ready to leave. On reflection, James recognized that, "Sweat and effort, human nature strained to its uttermost and on the rack, yet getting through alive, and then turning its back on its success to pursue another more rare still – this is the sort of thing the presence of which inspires us" (p. 272). Thus, James believed the notion of significance provided a goal for one's life direction and that significance could include risk and what he termed "precipitousness" in the process. In other words, significance was part of the answer to the question: How should we live? James also recognized that a life of significance is not necessarily an easy life; it may indeed involve drudgery, repetition, risk and perhaps even pain – the very qualities inherent in endurance sport.

It is important to acknowledge the place of first-person accounts in philosophy and philosophy of sport. Thoreau (2012) began many inquiries starting with the "I" or personal experience, and then moving to the communal "we." He wrote: "In most books, the I, or first person, is omitted; in this it will be retained ... I should not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew as well. Unfortunately, I am confined to this theme

by the narrowness of my experience” (p. 199). In this vein, part of the research method here entails use of first-person accounts to both underscore the prevalence of Strava in the endurance sport community, and also connect the individual accounts to the broader community.

The American philosophical stream provides helpful concepts to consider relative the endurance sport participant usage of Strava. One such concept is the notion of habits. Writing about the path he created through the trees from his cabin to Walden Pond, Thoreau (2012) wrote: “The surface of the earth is soft and impressible by the feet of men; and so with the paths which the mind travels. How worn and dusty, then, must be the highways of the world, how deep the ruts of tradition and conformity!” (p. 460). For those actions we repeat, it is indeed worth considering the impact of these actions on our overall lives.

To wit, through our daily actions we create habits which may or may not be helpful. For runners, bikers, and swimmers who use Strava, this app is indeed habitual. We may easily form habits with self-tracking devices and in other areas of life as well. but they may not necessarily be positive ones or ones which lead to lives of meaning. Some endurance athletes, for example, have decided to quit using Strava because of the impact the habitual use of Strava has on their daily lives (e.g., Hancock, 2021).

To summarize the methodological approach used in this study, the paper uses a phenomenological approach informed by experiences with endurance sport. In this way, the phenomenon of endurance sport provides the subject matter, interpreted through athlete participation. The author draws on first-person accounts, including use of Strava for both running and swimming. These insights are compared with the philosophical concepts found in American philosophy – themes of community, identity, immersion, and the good life. The author also incorporates and integrates other research on social media more broadly and Strava in general to understand the phenomenon. The results gleaned from this study include a more complete understanding of Strava use among endurance athletes, the overall impact of this use, and the implications from a philosophical and ethical perspective that inform such usage.

Examination of Strava

With the introductory comments behind, I want to now move to a brief overview of the app. Strava, which means “strive” in Swedish, is ubiquitous in the endurance sport community. I kept a running log for years but did not join Strava until January of 2020; my brother-in-law, an early technology adopter, invited me to join his Strava club called the Shellicles. Now, four years later, I have a hard time pursuing my active lifestyle without using the app. Between my phone app and computer web option, I peruse Strava numerous times per day. Following my run and swim workouts, I pull up the app to examine the data – for example, minutes per mile on my runs, along with elevation gain, calories burned, average heart rate, pace per 100 yards on my swims, and so forth. The GPS provides a detailed map of my runs. I scan my feed and observe workouts others have completed – reading their workout descriptions, looking at their pictures, giving them the

“thumbs up” form of kudos as I scroll through the feed. Throughout the day, my phone alerts me when others give my workouts “kudos” or add comments.

In terms of the overall app features, Huber (2021) writes that Strava “functions as a weird hybrid between a personal training log and an explicitly social medium for sharing photos, workout tips, segment leaderboard rivalries, and words of encouragement.” George (2020) describes Strava as “a guidebook and a corkboard ... It is a training log, chat room and map room.” In addition, the social nature of Strava provides an opportunity for competition among self and others. Gabriels and Coeckelbergh (2019) write that through, “live connectivity and instant feedback and judgment ... the technology mediates the possibility to game oneself and others” (p. 124). I admit, it is interesting to track my yearly mileage progress against friends or compete to see how many times I can complete a given segment to earn the “Local Legend” title. My workout entries periodically include brief descriptions of the run or race, along with pictures (especially on trail runs in the mountains).

In general, Strava provides numerous features attractive to endurance sport enthusiasts. Not exclusive to endurance sports, however, Strava provides opportunities for all kinds of athletes to use the app – from stand-up paddlers to ice skaters to CrossFit and yoga enthusiasts. The free version includes features such as a feed showing workouts of others, join clubs, and the opportunity to log workouts and track progress. For \$11.99/month or \$79.99/year USD, subscribers have access to additional items such as: My Goals, Heatmaps, Training Log, Training Plans, and Build a Route. While other apps like Fitbit and MyFitnessPal may have more users, and appeal to the general population, Strava fills a niche for those athletes who may be more serious about their pursuits (Curry, 2023).

Benefits of Strava

As millions of users can attest, Strava provides many benefits for athletes of all types. As compared with social media apps in general, Strava users generally interact with the app in a productive, and perhaps even uplifting, manner. George (2020) contends that “Strava is still a beacon of positivity ... Trolling is rare and usually only takes the form of excessive kudos from randoms – and what’s wrong with that? I get regular abuse on Twitter; on Strava, I have never had anything but encouragement ... And in these days of public carping and rage, it is something I prize more than race prizes: it is a refuge.” My own experience has been overwhelmingly helpful. I stay away from other social media such as Twitter (now X) and Facebook because of the divisive nature that seems to pervade in their circles, and appreciate the constructive energy and spirit of Strava users. It makes sense that endurance athletes, and others, would benefit from a platform where the general ethos trends toward positivity.

Next, because of the shared data and social networking capability, using Strava can help promote a positive sense of accountability. Ultra-endurance athlete Rich Roll says:

There’s something uniquely special about being privy to the daily grind of my favorite multi-sport athletes. Their transparency holds me accountable. In turn, I help hold my

community accountable. And openly sharing our collective fitness experience – the highs and the lows – makes all of us better. (in George, 2020)

In a sense, this transparency of training efforts may help others improve as athletes and, perhaps, improve as people as well. Scrolling through my feed, it is possible to experience this sense of accountability with friends in remote locations, those in my hometown, and even world-class athletes like Ultra-Trail du Mont-Blanc (UTMB) champion Jim Walmsley. When I see cousin Marty complete a 5k race in Iowa, I am inspired and may consider finding my own race to enter. Seeing other friends finish tough runs in challenging weather conditions may encourage me to demonstrate similar fortitude in my own workouts.

Another positive aspect of Strava is its use of gamification. The app provides numerous ways to compete with both self and others. For example, users may create a group challenge such as competing to see who may complete a set distance in the fastest time, or establishing a group goal (e.g., the number of miles in a week), or seeing who can complete the longest distance. Other challenges include striving for Local Legend status, the most times completing a given segment over a 90-day period; or the champion of a Strava Segment – a portion of a trail or road where individuals may compete to determine who has the fastest time. Hancock (2021) writes, “All of these mini-games are things added to the app to drive additional usage within the app. They’re fun and create the dopamine rush so essential to getting people hooked – literally addicted – to an app.” While this quality of gamification can potentially leak into a negative space, in the sense of getting people to become physically active, it is a positive quality for sure.

Finally, the app provides a means to engage in a way that may be considered artistic. For example, some athletes have used the GPS function to create their own “performance art” with their routes (George, 2020), including a website dedicated to compiling these works depicting images of items from dinosaurs to people to words to food and drink¹. In a related manner, Westlake (2021) contends that using Strava to document and post workouts is not unlike an artistic performance – both have an audience. Westlake uses the terms “reflection-as-performance” to illustrate this point, where athletes use titles of workouts or comments to reflect on their workout (e.g., posting pictures, responding to kudos/comments). Scrolling through my Strava feed, I regularly come across creative and witty workout titles among those who I follow – titles such as Leaf Surrfff; - 115% of fitness – Starting Fresh; Possum persimmon party; and Just Ugh. While the opportunities for documentation and creativity can potentially dip towards narcissism – perhaps if athletes share too much information or come across as overly self-absorbed – it can also enhance the aesthetic potential of the experience and even provide a bit of humor.

Issues with Strava

While the Strava benefits are plentiful, there are also potential pitfalls related to the app usage, from safety and privacy concerns to ones related to mental health. First, because of the public nature of the app (e.g., posting workouts online), there is a concern

¹ <https://strav.art>

about individual safety and, in particular, for women. Since Strava uses GPS data to record workouts, posting this information online potentially publicizes one's physical location. If an athlete regularly runs on the same mornings every week, for example, and also in the same location, this could become a potential risk. While Strava has taken steps to address the personal privacy issues, the user still needs to remain cognizant of the privacy settings and consider who may have access to the data. On a related note, Strava also received criticism in 2017 when they released a heatmap which seemed to identify secret United States military headquarters based on the physical activity levels of soldiers (Hern, 2018).

On a related note, additional concerns relate to safety in terms of potential for accidents created by Strava use. One feature of the app is attaining a record time on a particular course segment. These portions, or segments, of overall routes may be publicized and some athletes regularly seek to attain the top spot. A local running segment titled "Up Bluestone" provides competition opportunities for self and others. Clicking on the link, I am able to view the overall segment record, a list of the overall fastest times, along with my own all-time personal record and segment efforts. Unfortunately, this quest for segment records, while running or cycling on roads that are not closed to vehicle traffic, can potentially lead to unsafe situations (George, 2020). One might imagine a cyclist, for example, blowing through a stop sign in order to pursue a segment record.

Similar to other social media platforms, using Strava may lead to concerns around social pressure and self-presentation related to mental or physical health (Russell et al, 2023). The nature of posting workouts in a public forum creates the ability to compare and contrast self with others. While this comparison may be healthy and even inspiring, it can also potentially lead to a negative sense of health. Part of this concern is related to the competitive nature of the users and the app features, a sense of "keeping up with the Joneses" (Hancock, 2021). If an athlete feels pressured to log too many miles at speeds or paces too fast, this may put the athlete at risk for physical or psychological injury. Additionally, if other users create a narrative which is largely positive – always seeming to improve, never injured, trail runs with impressive scenic backdrops – it may create pressure for others to post workouts in a similar vein, or perhaps question whether or not their own training and racing is as successful or interesting or meaningful.

Another potential issues to consider regarding the use of apps like Strava is the impact on the user. Gabriels and Coeckelbergh (2019) contend that "self-tracking technologies [such as Strava] increasingly alter the self in directions by responding to and evaluating performances ... This way, the self, including her bodily information, becomes visible for an audience" (p. 119). While Strava is indeed a form of self-tracking, part of its appeal is the social aspect of usage. Athletes log on, not only to track their own workouts, but to share their workouts with others, and view other athlete workouts too. While Strava may function as a workout diary of sorts: "instead of a blank page, the user finds himself/herself in an environment that is already pre-shaped by the designers. The design of the technology constrains the content" (Gabriels & Coeckelbergh, p. 120). As such, this environment impacts how the endurance sport user interacts with the app and thus the endurance

sport community; it is reciprocal in nature. If Strava use leads people towards a positive and healthy view of self, that is a plus; if not, then Strava use may become problematic.

Furthermore, some have criticized Strava users for the potential of promoting narcissistic behavior, even referring to Strava sarcastically as Socially Tracking All Vain Activity (Couture, 2021). For example, uploading a particularly difficult workout or race to Strava invites others to both see and, perhaps, acknowledge and affirm the accomplishment. After my most recent ultramarathon race – the Martha Moats Baker Memorial run, a 50k trail race – I found myself scrolling through Strava to see how many people would give me kudos (it turns out 20). If I based a significant amount of self-identity on receiving this public affirmation, if I trained and raced with the express purpose of receiving kudos, then this may indeed represent “vain activity.” At times this narcissistic behavior appears with users who display a tendency to overshare personal information. In a Reddit post titled “The Annoying Runners of Strava,” one archetype listed is “The Overly Open Book” Strava user²:

Every run has a very long, very descriptive title, filled with more information than anyone cares to know. They also use far, far too many emoji's. example: " 7k run on this ☁️ cloudy ☁️ day! felt good 👉 but sore at the end 😞, maybe it was the bagel I had!! 🍌😞😞 hope I don't fall asleep at work and can have energy for bowling 🎳 later!! lol 😞".

An additional issue rises in the sense of how Strava tracks workout data – mileage, pace, heart rate, elevation gain, calories expended, splits, cadence and so forth. For the data geeks who use Strava, the platform provides copious amount of data available for study, perhaps leading to improved performance. This quantification of our lives and the lives of others may become problematic, however. Gabriels and Coeckelbergh (2019) write that by viewing ourselves primarily in quantified ways, we may “strip away understanding, reflection and context. While older technologies do not necessarily lead to such understanding and reflection, they at least encourage it or leave more room for it” (p. 125). This leads us to consider the extent to which Strava use may lead towards quantification that may become detrimental to our overall life significance or meaning.

INSIGHTS FROM AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY

Given the benefits and challenges with using Strava, how can American philosophical concepts help us understand the landscape? More precisely, how might one use Strava in ways consistent with living a meaningful life? My aim here is not to address all of the potential issues with Strava but rather those related to the pursuit of significance or meaning. The most salient way to frame this assistance is through an emphasis on cultivating the inner self, living in a manner which promotes a healthy, balanced, and flourishing self-identity. I have in mind various areas related to this cultivation of self that connects with the use of self-tracking apps such as Strava.

² https://www.reddit.com/r/running/comments/b7g7ow/the_annoying_runners_of_strava/.

With a cultivation of inner self in mind, let us begin by considering the impact of technology writ large. Thoreau (2012) is a fitting source for commentary on technological change and its impact on human society. In the late 19th century, he was skeptical of communication “improvements” and wrote: “We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate” (p. 239). The point is that we may develop innovative ways to function in medicine or business or even sport and physical activity settings. These new forms of technology, however, may not necessarily lead to personal or societal flourishing. In short, the technological innovation may not cultivate the betterment of individual.

Strava, like other social media apps, may encourage us to follow others at the expense of allowing room for our inner muse to appear. The runner may scroll through Strava and feel a self-imposed pressure to run similar mileage or races as others when in fact perhaps the runner may experience more significance by running fewer miles, perhaps at a more leisurely and observant pace, rather than focus on distance and time. Thoreau (2012) was critical of this tendency for comparison and wrote “If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away” (p 462). Many writers in American philosophy contend that personal experience may bring to bear on important philosophical themes and insights. Webb (1999) writes “Only as we examine our lives have we any hope of discovering what makes them worth living, and everything depends on the faithfulness with which we undertake this self-examination” (p. 64). I concur with Webb and find it plausible that practices such as running and endurance sport may be important in this regard. Thus, it becomes important to consider to what extent Strava allows for this self-examination and to what extent it gets in the way.

Cultivation of the inner self requires a sense of attention towards one’s thoughts and ruminations, dreams and aspirations, attention that may be difficult to experience in a fast-paced world. We may become easily distracted by the “noise” of social media or literal sounds of television or music. In his writing, Thoreau (2012) advocated for solitude as a means to create time and space for this kind of attention on self. For the endurance athlete, training periods often include moments of both silence and solitude; if the runner is so focused on achieving goals because of Strava input, however, the nature of the experience may become less rich. Thoreau put a premium on attention and noticing one’s surroundings; he maintained a journal that he used to chronicle his experiences walking, recording detailed observations of his natural surroundings as well as his inner thoughts. Similarly, Strava makes it possible to comment on, and take pictures or videos, of one’s surroundings – both for personal account and also perhaps to share. The importance of listening for and being attentive through solitude is not just about the experience per se, but rather how these experiences may lead to personal growth and human improvement.

Part of this cultivation of inner self requires a level of reflection, considering our past experiences, for example, and learning from these experiences. The nature of reflection may be impacted by the intervening time between action and reflection. Bugbee (1999) writes: “But reflection, it seems, must earn the gift of the essential meaning of things past.

It is as if experience must continue underground for some time before it can emerge as springwater, clear, pure, understood" (p. 140). Considering the use of Strava viz-a-viz reflection, the level and meaning of reflection depends on the user. It depends if the individual comes back to the Strava entry in question, perhaps a week or month or year after the experience. This may involve perusing the entry to view, once again, the pictures, the kudos, the statistics, and other written descriptions. In this way, Strava provides ample data points and information upon which one might reflect. Perhaps from a distance, with the assistance of Strava, the reflective individual is able to make sense or meaning of the experience in fuller detail. That is, physical activity becomes more than just "checking a box" or taking one's "exercise as medicine" but physical activity is experienced as part of a meaningful life. Conversely, if Strava use negatively impacts the ability to harbor this retrospective experience, then it could be disruptive to one's life.

Anderson (2001) lifts up the potential for movement to serve as a way to improve our lives, to help us attain a better version of ourselves, perhaps. He writes, "Movement is a place where anyone might meet possibility, establish creativity, and in the process, both learn about and establish her or his 'self'" (p. 145). In order for activities such as endurance sport to help facilitate this cultivation of inner self, a particular orientation or stance is needed. Movement may indeed function in ways consistent with a significant life and Strava can potentially support this kind of life, although it may also become a barrier. Anderson continues, "As both Thoreau and Emerson maintain, our awakening requires an orientation or attitude of openness on our part. If such an attitude is brought to participation, then the humanizing possibilities can be realized", (p. 142). For the Strava user, therefore, the important point is to remain attentive towards one's attitude and the impact that Strava use has on one's life and relationships.

Striving towards a life of significance involves another concept germane to American philosophy – a sense of growth. McDermott (2007) writes that for John Dewey, growth is "the quality of being humanly enriched by our experience, even if it be failure or loss. Further, growth is not simply an outcome or a result. It is the very nature of the live creature when participating in the flow of experience" (p. 288). This quality of growth certainly applies to sport participation. We may consider the extent to which Strava use impact influences growth. Part of this could be the connection between our human activities and our efforts to recognize and also chronicle this growth. Strava provides data to track the physiological changes that take place through endurance sport; users may need to consider ways to also track potential changes and growth that may be less visible (e.g., growth as a friend or parent) but no less important.

The notion of growth also seems to entail a certain degree of commitment. In his book, *The Inward Morning*, Henry Bugbee (1999) provides a moving illustration of fishing, an activity which highlights Bugbee's commitment to this craft. Bugbee writes: "It takes many, many days to learn of what may and may not be in the river. Let us wade right in and keep fishing where we are, with our fingertips touching the trembling line" (p. 86). Webb (1999) argues that this passage is not necessarily about catching the fish, however, but rather about faith; it's about "keeping one's fingertips on the trembling line." Perhaps

Strava is beneficial not just because it helps document our accomplishments (e.g., PRs, gathering kudos, segment records) but rather because it may also document our faith in the practice, a commitment to the practice of running, biking, swimming as part of who we are as athletes. Strava provides a way to demonstrate (to ourselves and others) a commitment to the active life, and a faith that their repeated efforts are part of creating a meaningful life.

Finally, a careful consideration of one's inner self, connected with a meaningful human project such as endurance sport, could potentially lead to creative moments or production. Thoreau wrote (1999, p. 50): "Do not tread on the heels of your experience. Be impressed without making a minute of it. Poetry puts an interval between the impression and the expression – waits till the seed germinates naturally". While writing my doctoral dissertation, one of my committee members commented on my strategy to write and run and cycle, the latter of which provided plenty of time to think about the dissertation while reflecting and in the process of moving; endurance sport participants may consider posting to Strava directly after the workout but then perhaps continue to add reflections to the post at a later time. Having access to Strava data may provide ways to help remember an event, creating opportunities for coming back to it to add more detail in ways something akin to poetry (e.g., Leonard, 2023).

CONCLUSION

In the article, "Technologies of the self and others: how self-tracking technologies also shape the other," Gabriels and Coeckelbergh (2019) advocate for a particular approach when using Strava, in a way that runs consistent with the American philosophical themes previously mentioned. They write that Strava users: "focus should be more on autonomy and self-control, to make self-shaping less dependent on likes and opinions (...) Instead of focusing on physical improvement, these technologies focus on moral improvement and self-knowledge in the humanist tradition" (p. 126). I agree with this point that Strava use, when approached from a stance of cultivation of the inner self, an approach that can lead to self-knowledge, can also lead to moral improvement. In this way, the focus becomes working towards a meaningful life for self and for those around us – including others in our respective self-tracking communities. Engaged in a stance where we periodically reflect on our habits, we stand a better chance of engaging with technology in ways consistent with a meaningful life.

While the topic here is focused on one particular form of technology, other social media platform use by athletes could serve as potential areas of fruitful research. One can imagine similar lines of inquiry focused on sport participant use of X, Facebook, or Instagram. Additionally, the topic of social media use could also be viewed from other philosophical areas as well, perhaps its relation to epistemology, axiology, or aesthetics, and from participant vantage points beyond endurance sport. For example, what are the philosophical values connected to team sport participant use of Instagram? Or, to what

extent might Instagram contribute to or enhance the aesthetic appreciation for sports such as gymnastics or diving?

While this paper focuses on the philosophical aspects related to Strava use among endurance athletes, the work has scientific relevance in terms of implications for other academic areas. Those scholars in psychology may pursue research related to Strava participation – perhaps connected to topics such as identity, motivation, or exercise adherence. Additionally, researchers in the area of sociology may examine the social nature of Strava use in the endurance sport community; what does it mean to join a Strava club as compared with joining a “physical” running club? To what extent does Strava use encourage either positive or negative peer pressure among adherents? Or, scholars in exercise physiology may be interested in potential physiological outcomes related to Strava use. Do Strava users attain levels of fitness any different from endurance sport participants who do not use Strava?

In addition to sport-related research, the study may provide impetus for scientific research in the areas within media studies. For example, in what ways does Strava use among endurance athletes help build trust or credibility in terms of the communication form? Or, to what extent does Strava use help shape public opinion within the endurance sport community? And, in what ways does the social nature of Strava discourse shape the individual communication modes among participants? In sum, the philosophical ideas and outcomes in this paper may help prompt scientific lines of inquiry related to Strava use for endurance athletes.

My personal plan is to use Strava going forward, continuing to remain mindful about use in terms of time spent and attitude towards the technology. I hope to continue reflecting on my motives for its use, continuing to ask myself: Is the app enhancing my life or getting in the way of my pursuit of a meaningful life? I recognize the tendency to compare my performance with others and have to remain grateful for ability to run long distances – that I do not need to prove my worth to others by comparing myself on Strava. In addition, it seems to me that the American philosophical tradition and themes, and more generally, a philosophical research approach for sport, help provide insights for this way forward.

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POHVALE, SEGMENTI I TOPLINSKE KARTE: TRAŽENJE SMISLENOG ŽIVOTA UZ POMOĆ STRAVE

Douglas Hochstetler

SAŽETAK Razvoj i korištenje aplikacija društvenih medija stvaraju kako prilike tako i izazove za korisnike, uključujući zajednicu sportaša koji treniraju sportove izdržljivosti. Aplikacija Strava, pokrenuta 2009. godine, stekla je popularnost i dosegla približno 100 milijuna korisnika do ožujka 2024. godine. Ponekad nazivana društvenim medijem za sportaše koji treniraju sportove izdržljivosti, Strava je primjer specifičnog oblika virtualne komunikacije koji je vrijedan istraživanja. U ovom radu ciljevi su: 1) opisati značajke aplikacije i njezin utjecaj na korisnike, uključujući koristi i izazove i 2) istražiti brojne etičke probleme povezane s korištenjem Strave. Metode uključuju filozofski pristup s posebnim fokusom na američku filozofsku tradiciju (npr. Henry David Thoreau, William James i Henry Bugbee), uz prikaz osobnog korištenja Strave za trkačke i plivačke treninge.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI

SPORTOVI IZDRŽLJIVOSTI, DRUŠTVENI MEDIJI, FILOZOFIJA, ETIKA, ISKUSTVO

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