

Surfing, Sharks, and the Limits of Reason

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Introduction

“Aren’t you afraid of sharks?” This is, without a doubt, the most common question I receive from bystanders on the beach, and my response is always the same, “not enough, apparently.” Indeed, since I first started surfing, roughly four years ago, in what I only belatedly learned was the “Shark Bite Capital of the World” —Volusia County, Florida—I have closely encountered more sharks than I would have ever imagined. Just today, I observed a spinner shark jump out of the water from nowhere, perform an acrobatic flip attack on a fish, only feet away from me. Was I alarmed? Absolutely! Nonetheless, as has become predictable practice for me when the waves are good, and much to the chagrin of worried friends and loved ones, I continued my surf session. Curiously enough, surfing aside, I have always been cautious when it comes to my physical safety and well-being. To this day, highway driving, which I know to be a statistically risky activity, causes me anxiety. Yet, notwithstanding repeated injuries, shark encounters, and other close calls, I continue, day in and day out, to risk life and limb for a recreational activity —albeit one for which I have unbridled passion. It is the apparent irrationality of this pursuit, so out of character for me, that I find especially interesting.

Am I, in fact, behaving unreasonably in this regard? As behavioral economists have underscored in recent years, people naturally ‘discount the future’—placing greater emphasis on immediate versus long-term rewards—and this can be a rational decision given the uncertainties of life. When does this tendency become excessive and inadvisable? Contrary to what Rationalist philosophers and economists have long suggested, emotionally driven decisions are not necessarily illogical ones, and reason can afford neither certitude in advance nor universal prescriptions to resolve future discounting dilemmas.

While some of these predicaments will be less problematic than others, there are no one-size-fits-all solutions, especially for those cases on the fringes. Such difficult questions are ultimately a matter of individual values and priorities, requiring a leap of probabilistic judgment, but not therefore an irrational one. From this perspective, surfing in the Shark Bite Capital of the World can be a reasonable choice.

Before proceeding, a quick terminological note. For this paper, in accord with colloquial usage, the terms “rational,” “reasonable,” and “logical,” and their respective antonyms, will be utilized interchangeably as synonyms. Broader definitional issues will be discussed in Section II.

I. Living Dangerously

“The secret for harvesting from existence the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment is: to live dangerously!”—Friedrich Nietzsche

Born and raised in snowy Canada, I never planned on surfing, let alone in shark-infested waters. I disliked analogous winter sports, like skiing and ice skating, always preferring to have my feet solidly grounded, and this was the pattern for most of my life. While Nietzsche, a champion of individuality and free expression, has long been among my favorite philosophers, I had generally ignored his solemn advice to “live dangerously.” In his masterwork, *The Gay Science*, from which the above quote is drawn, Nietzsche (2001) recommends risk-taking—putting your physical health and welfare on the line—as the key to optimal living and personal growth. These words did not resonate with me, however, until surfing became my great passion. As a lifelong athlete, I had my share of minor injuries, but nothing compared to the onslaught to which I would be subjected. Since I started surfing four years ago at the age of thirty-six, I have suffered multiple broken toes, two cracked ribs, a fractured nose, an eye contusion, and more sprains and bruises than I can count. Many of these injuries stem from falls, in which I have either been slammed against my surfboard or the ocean bottom. As will be discussed in greater detail in Section III, in order to successfully catch a wave, everything must come together just right, your takeoff position and paddling speed, the wind velocity and wave direction, etc. A moment’s hesitation, or

the slightest miscalculation, can be calamitous. You never know exactly what the ocean will do, and even the best surfers in the world regularly ‘wipe out.’

In accord, accidental drowning is a substantial surfing danger. Aside from the ever-present risk of getting knocked unconscious, rip currents—strong channels of water that flow outward, pushing away from the shore into deeper water—pose a serious threat as well. According to the United States Lifesaving Association website (November 16, 2020), rip current drownings account for over one hundred fatalities annually in our country. Between the years 2014-2019, Florida had by far the most deaths in this category (one hundred and thirty) of any state, dwarfing the number (seventy-eight) in California, which came in second (Pulver 2019). Rip currents occur in the “surf zone,” where surfers catch breaking waves and sharks roam in search of food. In general, the bigger the waves, the further offshore they break and the stronger the rip currents. As compared to other top surf spots around the world, where waves can exceed twenty feet in height, waves in Florida are generally smaller year-round (three to six feet, on a good day). During hurricane season in Florida, however, which extends from June to November, tropical systems can result in much larger waves, exceeding ten to fifteen feet: the most favorite time of year for surf-obsessed locals, relishing the opportunity to test their limits and experience the unparalleled adrenaline rush. It took me years to muster the nerve to venture out in such conditions, although the gnawing doubts never go away. “Is this really worth the risk? Why put oneself in such a precarious position? Does my surfing mania know no bounds?”

These questions became much less academic two months ago, when my surf leash snapped in hurricane conditions. The invention of the surf leash, a rubberized lifeline connecting surfer (typically by ankle) to surfboard, was a significant safety advance for the sport. Surfers generally do not wear life vests, which unduly restrict motion. Instead, we rely on surf leashes to keep us attached to the sole flotation device at our disposal, our surfboards. Alas, if you become tangled, these leashes can cause serious injury as well, and none are failsafe. Even the most durable can suddenly snap without warning. Although I had previously lost my share of leashes in this manner, on the occasion in question, the waves were double overhead, and the danger was exponentially greater. I was left stranded far from shore, in heavy rip currents, as towering

waves relentlessly pummeled down. A sitting duck for the larger predatory sharks found in deeper waters, I tried to keep panic at bay. I swam and swam, for how long I cannot say, before finally collapsing on the beach, too tired to move, but most grateful to be alive. Indeed, I most certainly do not have a death wish, and recoil at the prospect of an untimely demise: not just out of self-consideration, but in deference to my loved ones, upon whom I would hate to inflict any undue suffering. Nonetheless, the day after this close call, true to form, I strapped on a new surf leash, and once again braved the hurricane conditions, unable to resist the call.

Rip currents and tropical waves aside, the persistent, year-round threat of a shark attack remains my greatest fear. Year after year, Volusia County, Florida has been the worldwide leader in unprovoked attacks, with New Smyrna Beach, located just miles away from my daily surf spot, earning the infamous designation as “Shark Bite Capital of The World.” As reported on the Florida Museum’s International Shark Attack File (ISAF) website (November 16, 2020), there were twenty-one shark bite cases in Florida in 2019, which was lower than the annual average of thirty-two for the previous five years. Unprovoked attacks in Volusia County accounted for nearly half of the Florida incidences in 2019, which, in turn, constituted over half of the United States total and over one third of the worldwide total. A jaw-dropping, fifty-three percent of the worldwide cases in 2019 were surfing-related! Explaining the magnified risk for surfers, the ISAF website notes, “this group spends a large amount of time in the surf zone, an area commonly frequented by sharks, and may unintentionally attract sharks by splashing, paddling, and ‘wiping out.’” Unfortunately, surfers and sharks occupy the same ocean spots, and common surfing activities are apt to attract unwanted attention. While most shark attacks in Volusia County are not fatal, this does little to alleviate the fear.

As I can personally attest, sharks frequent the surf zones in Volusia County. In four years, I have encountered more than I can enumerate, typically blacktip and spinner sharks, which are among the most common in the region. During peak season in late summer and early fall, I rarely have a surf session without a sighting. On a few occasions, to my horror, I have crossed paths with a bull shark, one of the most deadly and aggressive species. For every shark I have seen, I presume there have been several that have escaped my awareness.

Most of the year, the ocean water has a murky green hue, obscuring a lot of underwater activity. Fortunately, none of my shark encounters to date have resulted in an attack. Typically, the sharks have shown no interest in me. On other occasions, they have reversed course, ostensibly scared off. I know, however, that I may not be so lucky the next time, and try as I might to ignore the threat during a surf session, I often feel their looming presence, especially after a wipeout.

While there are other marine life dangers in Volusia County, jellyfish, stingrays, etc., none are of greater concern than sharks. Although the danger cannot be eliminated, there are ways to mitigate the risks of an attack, by for example: avoiding peak feeding times (dawn, dusk, and rainy conditions), surfing in a group rather than alone, and making a hasty retreat from the water if bleeding. I abide by these protocols, aside from surfing alone, since there is generally no alternative for me. I also wear a magnetized “shark band” around my ankle, for which there is some evidence of a deterrent effect, within a very limited range. Despite the insistent threat, the risk of an attack remains statistically low, even in the Shark Bite Capital of the World, and Volusia County offers some of the best surf spots on the United States East Coast. For this reason, the region boasts a large population of local surfers, who, like me, regularly enter these sharky waters, notwithstanding the danger. And perhaps, this may not be so irrational after all.

II. Rational Discounting

“Life is Uncertain. Eat Dessert First”—Ernestine Ulmer

Throughout my life, echoing the wisdom of Ernestine Ulmer, my mom has urged me to “eat dessert first, since life is short.” The old proverb, “a bird in the hand is better than two in the bush,” expresses similar wisdom. Should I stay in and work, or go out with friends? Keep driving that old Honda Civic and save my money, or splurge on a new car? Cheat on my diet tonight? Life presents countless dilemmas of this sort, across a variety of domains (financial, moral, health-related, romantic, etc.), which involve an apparent conflict between immediate payoffs and longer-term rewards. Some of these dilemmas are of the more mundane, inconsequential variety, while others can have potentially

life altering implications—like whether to surf in the Shark Bite Capital of the World. With respect to all such conflicts, the traditional view among Rationalist economists and philosophers, like Plato (1997) and Immanuel Kant (2012), has been very one-sided. While bemoaning that we often fall short due to vice and weakness, these theorists contend that the *normative* question of how we ought to resolve these dilemmas could not be clearer: the “rational choice” is to delay gratification and forego the immediate reward, with an eye to the future. Are these theorists correct? Is it always wrong to opt for a quick payoff? To the contrary, as emphasized below, sometimes ‘eating dessert first’ can be the most rational decision, depending on the individual and situation in question.

Arguably, no field has provided greater insight regarding this issue than a recent interdisciplinary offshoot of economics, called “behavioral economics.” With an emphasis on empirical study and research, this discipline has shed fascinating new light on human decision-making, undermining many of the conventional Rationalist assumptions. As defined by one of its Nobel Prize winning founders, Richard Thaler (2015), behavioral economics “is economics done with strong injections of good psychology and other social sciences” (9). Traditionally, economics has focused on normative questions concerning how idealized “rational agents” *ought* to make decisions, while discounting the way people might deviate in actual practice. In contrast, behavioral economics incorporates descriptive scientific findings to inform its prescriptive recommendations. By focusing on our characteristic patterns of behavior in real world situations, behavioral economists have supplanted the outmoded view of rationality hampering the traditional approach.

One of the chief obstacles in this regard has been an unrealistic view of cognition and emotion. According to the conventional view, rational agency requires cold reasoning, devoid of affect. On this theory, our feelings are normatively irrelevant with respect to how we ought to behave, and emotional decisions are inherently illogical. Characterizing this dogma, which he rejects, Steven Pinker (1997), the eminent cognitive scientist, writes:

[emotions] are hot, irrational impulses and intuitions, which follow the imperatives of biology. The intellect comes from civilization and lives in the mind. It is a cool deliberator that follows interests of self and society by keeping emotions in check... When we say someone is led by emotion rather than reason, we often mean that the person sacrifices long-term interests for short-term gratification (369 and 393).

Proponents of this erroneous view claim that we can reason effectively without emotional input. Our feelings should be ignored, since they lead us to blindly indulge our immediate appetites, at the expense of our long-term welfare. For this reason, future discounting is irrational, and we should always choose the distant reward, irrespective of the circumstance.

Unfortunately for its proponents, this bifurcated view of the mind, and the normative conclusions drawn on this basis, do not hold up empirically. Today, the neuroscientific evidence is clear: reasoning requires emotional input, and there is no sharp divide between thinking and affect. Rather, the respective brain regions are inextricably linked via dazzlingly complex recursive pathways and synaptic connections (Churchland 2013). Emphasizing this point, Pinker (1997) underscores, “emotions are adaptations...that work in harmony with the intellect and are indispensable to the functioning of the whole mind” (370). Feelings express our values, signaling what we care about, and we cannot make decisions without them. As documented by the neuroscientist Antonio Damasio (2005), patients with damage to the ventral medial prefrontal cortex, the brain region where emotional inputs are consolidated with higher order cognitive processes, show dramatic deficits. Without the normal affective cues (what Damasio calls “somatic markers”) to guide their decision-making, these patients struggle mightily to make even the most rudimentary choice, like what to order at Starbucks or when to schedule a follow-up appointment. If left to their own devices, they can spend hours on such menial problems, let alone more demanding ones, finding themselves incapable of reaching a final judgment. In accord, as emphasized by theorists like Jonathon Haidt (2001) and Jonah Lehrer (2009), there is overwhelming cognitive scientific evidence that everyday reasoning is typically driven by gut intuitions and feelings—and many of our affectively laden judgments are normatively sound. Countering the traditional Rationalist view, emotional decisions are neither inherently illogical nor prescriptively bankrupt. Theorists of all stripes acknowledge the *empirical* fact that we often discount the future, opting for immediate rewards rather than potentially greater ones down the road, in a wide variety of circumstances. Even if these ‘present biased’ choices tend to be more affectively based, they may be rational, nonetheless.

Indeed, Pinker (1997) argues that future discounting can be a reasonable approach, given the uncertainties of life. He writes, “going for the quick reward

instead of a distant payoff is often the rational strategy...[We] all die sometime, and we all risk foregoing the opportunity to enjoy something if we defer it too long” (393-394). Anytime you pass up an immediate benefit for something potentially better in the future, there are inherent risks. For example, your life circumstances could change unexpectedly. Maybe you miscalculated your future needs and priorities, or perhaps the future reward will not be delivered as promised. Regrettably, you also might not be around to collect, in the case of an unexpected demise. Pinker (1997) underscores that the risks of reward deferment would have likely been magnified in our ancestral past, and as such, discounting the future is probably an evolved tendency, rooted in emotion. “In our ancestors’ nomadic lifestyle...the payoffs for [immediate] consumption must have been even higher...[and] *some* urge to indulge now had to have been built into our emotions” (394). Although he acknowledges that this inclination is likely less adaptive in our modern environment than it would have been in the past, and it can undoubtedly lead to bad choices, Pinker (1997) contends that there are still many cases in which opting for present enjoyment is the rational choice. “Even today, the delay of gratification is sometimes punished because of the frailty of human knowledge” (396).

So, when is discounting the future reasonable rather than deleterious? As standardly conceived in economics, “rationality” is predicated on the idea of “optimization.” According to this view, given a set of options, individuals ought to choose that which would best fulfill, or optimize, their long-term interests. In the strictest sense, given this conception, there is only one “rational choice” in any scenario, the option that would maximize your preference satisfaction over time. This, however, sets an unduly high bar. As Thaler (2015) emphasizes, “the optimization problems that ordinary people confront are often too hard for them to solve, or even come close to solving” (6). Given all the variables involved, it can be very difficult to accurately predict how different choices might impact the future. People’s preferences can change over time, and sometimes we only recognize what would have been in our best interest after the fact. Indeed, this conventional definition of rationality seems much too restrictive. The requirement that, in order to qualify, we need to pick the best, and only the best, available option is unrealistic—since, in many cases, this can only be reliably assessed in retrospect. Thus, it would be more plausible to speak in terms of choices that are relatively more or less reasonable

or optimal, given the available information at the time, as opposed to an all-or-nothing phenomenon, in which you either pick the best option or your choice is deemed “irrational.”

Regardless, even if it made sense to utilize a strict ‘rationality as optimization’ standard, this would still leave ample room for individual variation. People have different interests and values. For example, some care more about security and stability, while others need excitement and adventure, above all else. What may be a rational choice for the former, need not be so for the latter, given their differing commitments. For some people, like Nietzsche, leading an optimal life requires discounting the future by “living dangerously” in the present. It may be reasonable for me to surf in the Shark Bite Capital of the World given my overriding passion for the pursuit, but must this apply to you as well? If rationality can only be assessed with reference to our interests and priorities, which can vary from person to person, the behavioral prescriptions for different people in similar circumstances will not always be uniform. This, of course, pertains to future discounting scenarios as well: the reasonableness of such choices will ultimately depend on the unique values of the decision-maker. Since these ideals are a matter of individual preference and taste, reason cannot provide universal solutions that would apply to everyone, contrary to the traditional Rationalist presumption.

Sweeping behavioral recommendations will not work for future discounting dilemmas, and we can also never be certain about our choices in advance, given the probabilistic nature of these judgements. If I buy the new house now, will I regret not having the money available down the road? How much fun will I be missing out on if I stay home and work, rather than go to the concert? What is the likelihood of injury if I surf today? These decisions are always a gamble, to some degree, since we cannot know exactly what the future holds. Undoubtedly, not all discounting scenarios are equally problematic in this regard, and some will entail much greater risk and uncertainty than others. Obviously, it would not be prudent to always ‘eat dessert first.’ Among the many potential hazards, excessive future discounting can lead to an unhealthy diet, financial ruin, risky sexual practices, and accidental drowning, just to name a few. Conversely, betting too much on the future can result in bad investments, insufficient resources on hand, and lost opportunities for fun, leisure, adventure, and not to mention, missed waves. We can err by excessively

discounting the future or by not doing so enough. Which is the more rational bet? In attempting to resolve difficult dilemmas of this sort, we cannot rely on reason to provide certitude in advance, as Rationalist theorists have naively hoped. Instead, each of us must reach our own verdict in accord with our individual values, doing our best to navigate the inherent ambiguity shrouding probabilistic judgments of this type. As will be discussed in the next section, surfing has taught me a great deal in this regard.

Section III: The Limits of Reason

“My Passion for Surfing Was More Than My Fear of Sharks”—Bethany Hamilton, Championship Surfer & Shark Bite Survivor

Since I started surfing, I have been fascinated by interviews of shark bite survivors, especially local Floridians. Typically, these surfers indicate that they would never consider quitting in the aftermath. Their passion for the pursuit is simply too great, irrespective of the dangers. While expressing similar sentiments, Bethany Hamilton famously returned to professional competition after losing her arm to a great white shark, and she has been surfing ever since. I am not surprised that most surfers do not give up the sport after a bite. Nobody knows the potential risks that lurk in the water better than surfers, and I cannot believe how naïve I was in this regard, before I became initiated. I used to think I was safe in shallow waters, completely oblivious to potential warning signs, like nearby bait fish activity or decapitated marine life on the beach. On numerous occasions, I have warned unsuspecting beachgoers that a shark is only feet away from where they stand. In any case, most surfers have made a conscious decision that the joys of the pursuit far outweigh the potential hazards. Many survivors point to the statistically small chances of being bitten, irrespective of their bad luck. If they decided to surf prior to a bite, fully aware of the risks, why would they change course now? Some surfers express no fear of sharks, while others, like me, carry on despite the persistent worry. On occasion, after a bad string of injuries or shark sightings, I have flirted with the idea of quitting, but I have known, deep down, that these are just idle thoughts, given my devotion.

What do I find so irresistible about surfing? For me, there is something

magical about being out on the water, which is like an elixir. Irrespective of what may be occurring in my life on land, the moment I paddle out, I generally feel better, more relaxed, grateful, and humble. It is like visiting another world, a whole other ecosystem, untainted by cell phones and other modern gadgets, in which human affairs seem comparatively small. In addition, as a student of animal intelligence—having written my doctoral dissertation on the evolution of morality, with a focus on primates—I could not ask for a more stimulating environment. While shark sightings are common in Volusia County, dolphin encounters are even more frequent. I am treated regularly to stunning displays by large pods, with members of all ages, including babies, surpassing anything that SeaWorld could offer. These magnificent creatures will come within inches of my board, for long periods of time, and I never cease to be amazed by their manifest intelligence, curiosity, playfulness, and the remarkable depth and intricacy of their social bonds and behaviors. They also clearly enjoy surfing waves as well, putting humans to shame with their effortless skill. In addition to dolphins, who, true to their reputation, have never directed any aggression my way, a large variety of benign fish, sea turtles, and even the rare manatee, are also delights to behold.

Marine life encounters aside, surfing also affords great exercise and challenges, and a lot of practice with future discounting scenarios. It provides a full body workout, requiring strength, cardio, and balance, while still being great fun. In my case, like for so many others, after catching my first wave, that was it, I was hooked. I have always been a driven person who seeks out tests and opportunities for growth, and no sport in my experience has a steeper learning curve. Starting out as a “kook,” a typically pejorative term for beginner surfers, I fell, and fell, and fell, which only makes the rush of finally catching a wave that much sweeter. Four years and countless wipeouts later, most of my attempts are now successful, but the trials are ongoing: the insatiable drive to go bigger, ride longer and more artistically in the wave, never ceases. As I have progressed in the sport and watched professionals in competition, I have increasingly come to appreciate the vital importance of wave selection. The best surfers are patient and highly discriminating, only electing to ride waves that promise the greatest chance of success. Contrary to what may be presumed, surfing is, in large part, a waiting game, punctuated by

brief flurries of activity. Quality waves come in “sets,” typically encompassing around three to four waves in quick succession, followed by substantially more downtime before the next set comes through. Most of a surfer’s time and effort is spent paddling and fighting currents, trying to remain in position for a set wave. It can be very tempting to act precipitously and take the first wave on offer, a common beginner’s error, rather than waiting for a better one. Choosing the wrong wave can drastically increase the chances of a wipeout and injury, which I have learned the hard way. On many occasions, I have selected poorly, only to look back over my shoulder and see the best wave of the day, now frustratingly out of reach. Conversely, you can also be too selective and fastidious, passing up good opportunities in hopes for something superior that never arrives. In this sense, every wave presents a future discounting problem, requiring a quick choice between an immediate payoff or something potentially better down the line. Each option is a gamble, clouded by uncertainty. Waves are naturally unpredictable and conditions on the water can change instantly, without warning—but a decision must be made, nonetheless.

In addition to quotidian wave selection difficulties, and broader questions about whether to brave shark-infested waters, surfing regularly presents other future discounting dilemmas as well. Tough choices are required on days in which the surf conditions are especially rough and precarious. Is it worth the risk to venture out today, or not? On occasions when I have decided to tackle hurricane conditions, the comments from dubious strangers on the beach can be quite funny. “Really, dude, really!?” “Are you crazy!?” I have asked myself the same questions, and there are days when I have judged that the dangers are simply too great. Deciding when to end a surf session on a particularly good day can also be challenging. Although there are rideable waves year-round in Volusia County, the number of higher quality days, with good-sized waves and favorable wind conditions, are much more limited—just a handful a month, on average. It can be especially hard to call it quits on these days, and I am apt to tell myself, “just one more,” only to violate this resolution, time and time again. In surfing, you are only as good as your last wave, and you can perform outstandingly twenty times in a row, only to screw up the next one, and get a bad injury. Such slip-ups are more likely when tired. As such, knowing when to stop for the day, as hard as it may be, is a vital capacity, requiring future

discounting savvy. In this case, erring on the side of future prosperity, rather than the immediate reward of another quality wave.

Indeed, by forcing me to make innumerable future discounting judgments, surfing has had a profound impact on my life more generally. I have learned how to better accept the limits of reason, and leap more willingly into the unknown and embrace risk. As underscored in the previous section, contrary to the traditional Rationalist view, discounting the future can be a reasonable decision, depending on the values of the decision-maker and the specifics of the situation. While some cases will be relatively clear cut, many others will require difficult judgment calls. Individuals can err by excessively discounting the future or by not doing so enough, and it can be a gamble either way given life's uncertainties and the difficulty of accurately forecasting the future. Since these are probabilistic judgments, we cannot have certitude in advance. Often, what would have been the best choice can only be known in retrospect. Undoubtedly, opting for immediate indulgence tends to be a more emotionally laden decision, but as emphasized above, affective judgments are not intrinsically irrational, since reason and emotion are inextricably linked. Our feelings signal our values, and we cannot make decisions without affective input. These feelings do not always guide us correctly, and we should continually reevaluate their aptness based on the results of our previous choices. Reason has an important role to play in this regard. The conventional Rationalist goal, however, of furnishing judgments that are universalizable, certain, and devoid of emotion will not work for this category of problems. None of these criteria apply to future discounting dilemmas, which are ubiquitous in everyday life, and not just for surfers. These decisions require leaps of probabilistic judgment, and, despite what the traditional view holds, these ineluctable jumps are not inherently unreasonable. Rather, they must be judged rational or not solely with reference to the values and passions of the individual in question.

In surfing, there comes a point when deliberation must end, and you need to commit fully, despite the uncertain outcome. Many times, surfers will paddle for a wave, only to pass it up at the last moment, due to unforeseen developments. There is a razor thin margin, however, and once you have gone too far over that ledge, even the slightest hesitation can be disastrous. The temptation to abort at the last moment can be great, especially in big waves.

From the surfer's vantage point, it looks like you are going over a cliff, with no visible landing point to catch you: a safety ramp which will only appear on the wave face, after you have taken the plunge. Prior to becoming consumed by surfing, I struggled with future discounting problems in various facets of my life, tending to overthink them, while futilely grasping for certitude. Limited by a myopic view of rationality, I largely ignored my favorite philosopher's advice to "live dangerously" and consistently opted instead for the less risky option, as I perceived it at the time. While surfing in shark-infested waters may not be a reasonable choice for everybody, I think it has been for me—providing much needed perspective and practice, in the endless pursuit of an optimal life.

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