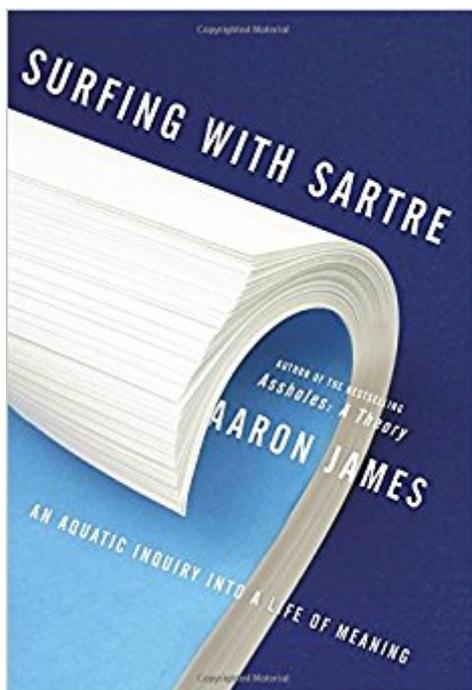


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# Surfing With Sartre: An Aquatic Inquiry Into A Life Of Meaning



## Synopsis

From the bestselling author of *Assholes: A Theory*, a book that—in the tradition of *Shopclass as Soulcraft*, *Barbarian Days* and *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*—uses the experience and the ethos of surfing to explore key concepts in philosophy. The existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre once declared "the ideal limit of aquatic sports . . . is waterskiing." The avid surfer and lavishly credentialed academic philosopher Aaron James vigorously disagrees, and in *Surfing with Sartre* he intends to expound the thinking surfer's view of the matter, in the process elucidating such philosophical categories as freedom, being, phenomenology, morality, epistemology, and even the emerging values of what he terms "leisure capitalism." In developing his unique surfer-philosophical worldview, he draws from his own experience of surfing and from surf culture and lingo, and includes many relevant details from the lives of the philosophers, from Aristotle to Wittgenstein, with whose thought he engages. In the process, he'll speak to readers in search of personal and social meaning in our current anxious moment, by way of doing real, authentic philosophy.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"I surf, therefore I am: a good-natured exploration of some of the big questions philosophy raises, all while hanging 10. In this nimble set of essays on topics such as work and freedom, James... gives a fine if idiosyncratic account of how philosophers puzzle out the world—idiosyncratic because it's framed from the point of view of a surfer. Throughout, the book is provocative and less laid-back than it might appear at first glance. A 12-page glossary defines some surfing and philosophy terms

alike. Heidegger as ho-daddy? The approach is unusual, but to fruitful and entertaining ends." Kirkus Reviews "Surfing With Sartre: An Aquatic Inquiry Into a Life of Meaning by Aaron James [is] a great book. James is a philosophy professor. He's written a beautiful book, essentially a dialogue with Jean-Paul Sartre about work and play. He's arguing that working less and playing more, especially in the surf, is not only an okay choice but a moral one. He makes a beautiful argument for why leisure and dedication to nature is a moral imperative at this time. It might sound like a stretch but he builds a case. The book also gives you a good excuse to surf a little more. Jaimal Yogis, author of *A Saltwater Buddha* "Stacks of pop philosophy books, from the late Robert M. Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* on down, have sought to equate everyday activities with a deeper understanding of reality and self. In Aaron James' new book, *Surfing with Sartre*, he uses the surfboard as a vehicle of enlightenment. It seems, at first glance, like a simple task. "Go with the flow," after all, might as well be the mantra of both the surfer and the sophist. But there's much more to *Surfing with Sartre* than that. Erudite yet engaging, the book strikes a winning balance between waxing wise and catching waves... James is both a professor of philosophy and an avid surfer, and his passion is palpable on the page... For all its heady discussion of philosophy and the technical aspects of surfing, *Surfing with Sartre* is surprisingly lively. James cannily navigates the metaphysics of Leibniz and the point breaks of Malibu with equal ease... he infuses *Surfing with Sartre* with just the right mix of personal insight and universal scope. The author himself playfully calls his book "comically grandiose," and it's exactly that, a work of both ambition and humility. Ultimately, it's as concerned with peace, fulfillment, and humanity's future as it is about the spray of salty surf on a summer's day. In fact, the two are the same. And his departing lesson is profound in its clarity: Surfing like life should be a thing of both pleasure and meaning." NPR.org "What can surfing teach us about politics, work, and freedom of choice, everyday getting around in the world, and even climate change? Turns out quite a lot, according to Aaron James, a professor of philosophy at the University of California, Irvine, and author of the new book *Surfing With Sartre: An Aquatic Inquiry Into a Life of Meaning*. James is known for mapping philosophical inquiry onto cultural touchpoints in ways that make dense theory accessible to the lay reader (see his heady and often hilarious theory of social relations via "asshole studies" in *Assholes: A Theory*). *Surfing With Sartre*, however, is not only a fun and informative read, it's also an important achievement in the way it draws together phenomenology and existentialism with a fresh look at some of the most serious ills plaguing modern life today—all told through a surfer theory of how to work

less and be stoked more, and in so doing, make the world a more sustainable place. If it sounds silly, it's not. "Surfing With Sartre" recalls the zen glories of Robert Pirsig's "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance" and Hubert Dreyfus's and Sean Dorrance Kelly's "All Things Shining" with the uberdupe axioms of "Point Break" and "The Big Lebowski". This is Nietzsche on a surfboard, and it's an epic ride." •Sierra Club staff

AARON JAMES holds a PhD from Harvard and is professor of philosophy at the University of California, Irvine. He is the author of *Assholes: A Theory*, *Assholes: A Theory of Donald Trump*, and *Fairness in Practice: A Social Contract for a Global Economy* and numerous academic articles. He was awarded a Burkhardt Fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies, and spent the 2009-10 academic year at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University. He's an avid, lifelong surfer and lives in Irvine, California.

Incredible, easy to read. UC Irving philosophy professor and winner surfer. "Less work, more surfing!!" The Age of Service and Leisure has been growing with us for the last 50 years James great solution --the 20-hour work week. His favorite arguments --the moral argument of the Climate Change pending disaster --we need to commute to work less, ie, pollutes less with leisure time activity like surfing or reading (biking to your nearest surf spot). If you are not a Californian --I pity you anyway --just choose an obsession that pollutes less than your current 40 hour job. Shift to the 20-hour week doesn't require the Swamp to do anything. Gridlock can continue until someone said --change requires coffins. The 20-hour work week can be between you and your boss. It will spread in a trial-and-error fashion, we will experiment with it. Each individual, each job considered special. Pay or compensation greatly varying too. Many of today's remaining blue and white collar jobs can lose the wasteful fat and with greater effort performed in just a 20-hour work week. Some jobs the boss may consider important enough to be done in a 20 hour work week but still with the salary of the previous 40-hour week. If some work is constantly needed --hire another 20-hour person to keep that work going. Trial and error --lets see how much dwindling work we have here --that automation and off-shoring doesn't continually eliminate. Aside --just as legislative or presidential actions can be view as experiments with the past. Not mandatory or coercive --the ambitious, our good workaholics --while perhaps driving fossil fuel engines less simply permit one more surfer to work a zero work hour week. As reason or justification for the coming 20-hour work week idea --for rich America to now continue to yield development to the rest of the world of incredible poverty.

Off-shoring, and their own econ development has lifted two billion world humans from incredibly wretched poverty, in the last 40 years --while American employment has been going down. Another serious moral imperative for us --to replace The Industrial Revolution's dear old Protestant Work Ethic. Everyone will come up with their own reason to work less hours, enjoy more leisure hours --or hours away from their initial work. We aren't going to create working jobs as fast as we get rid of them. No more Industrial Age initial surge for us. The Industrial Age has made us wealthy. And the necessary natural resources are dwindling. Just as each generations poor have assumed the previous luxury of the rich --the rest of the world is now going to bring themselves up to their Age of Leisure and Service just as we now enjoy. Less work, for those that want less. STEM and others probably don't want less work --a few probably want want more --more disposable income, more job results --medical doctors, Wall Street Wannnabes. James does deal with other philosophical Existential problems. Many, let me say, focused around Authority. The surfing communities James has played with and studied. And John Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Hobbs, Rousseau. Voltaire, Marcus Aurelius and many others. I think this is great reading today.

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