

Paleo Solution - 370

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Robb: Hey, folks, Robb Wolf here, another edition of the Paleo Solution Podcast, really, really excited for today's guest. First guest is Matt Thornton. Matt is one of my personal heroes. He is the founder of the Straight Blast Gym organization, he is a Brazilian jiu-jitsu black belt, and really someone that has dramatically influenced my thinking in the whole Brazilian jiu-jitsu scene and far beyond that as we will talk about a bit today. Our other guest is Peter Boghossian. Peter is an assistant professor of Philosophy at Portland State University. Guys, thank you so much for coming on the show today.

Peter: Thanks, Robb, I'm very happy to be here.

Matt: Thanks, Robb.

Robb: So we're going to talk about a lot of topics today, but I'd like to focus on a paper that, Peter, you co-authored and I believe was inspired not insignificantly by Matt's work. The title is "Critical Thinking, Pedagogy, and Jiu-Jitsu: Wedding Physical Resistance to Critical Thinking." That's a big mouthful, and there's a lot of stuff I'd like to unpack just in the title of that. But before we get into that, I have a tendency of doing very paltry introductions and background bios. I'd like both of you guys to maybe dig in a bit more into your background. Matt, let's go and start with you.

Matt: Sure. I'm a lifelong martial artist, obsessed with martial arts, got involved in Jeet Kune Do concepts when I left the military back in the late, very late '80s because the idea that Bruce Lee had of stand up, clinch and ground, as they put it, back in full range, so being able to fight in all different ranges made sense to me. I was boxing at the time, and I knew I needed to be able to fight on the ground as an example for some fights have been. I moved up to Portland because of a job I had, started teaching up here, was boxing at a boxing gym up here, and by happenstance I met Fabio Santos who was one of Rolls Gracie's and Rickson's first black belts. He was just up here building boats and surfboards and things. He wasn't teaching. He had put an ad in the newspaper, this is pre-Internet, asking for people to come, and he would pay if they would come to try and beat him up. My buddy and I were both boxing at the boxing gym all the time. We looked at each other, and we said, "We get beat up all the time for free so we might as well get paid for it." Long story short, I went there. Fabio was an awesome guy. It was predictable, body lock, takedown, mount, I'd roll, he'd choke. I knew right away I wanted to learn what he had. I started doing some privates. He got snatched up about, not great at the time, but I think it was about a year before the first UFC because he realized he's going to need staff, so

he left Portland. Around that same time or somewhere in there, I also ran into Rickson Gracie and the rest is history.

I was obsessed with Brazilian jiu-jitsu. I realized I didn't want to go to JKD concepts route because I had a lot of issues with a lot of their philosophy, and what I saw is a lot of hypocrisy in that community. I opened up my first school under the assumption I wouldn't be able to make any money because all the guys were always telling people, we just want to click six together and collect certificates, they're going to be poor, so you're going to be poor and turned out well for me. So I've been able to travel all over the world. I received my black belt, 2001, from my coach, through purple, brown and black, which is Chris Haueter who has been a huge influence on me. As most listeners or you probably know, we have gyms all over the world, and many of my coaches have gone on to tremendous success like John Kavanagh, his athletes, and Conor McGregor and other people. So I'm very proud of where the organization went. I'm humbled by what my students have been able to accomplish and I'm, yeah, grateful to be here and have a conversation with you.

Robb: That's fantastic. It's nice to see something built on integrity and a desire to really, legitimately help people really just barnstorm and succeed, so, congratulations to you and seriously, thank you for all the work that you've done. I don't know if you even remember your old website where you broke down the Zone diet and how you used that for some of your competition prep and stuff like that, but I've been following your work for ages. I actually have a downloaded, printed out sheets of when you were tinkering with your nutrition, your map theory of jiu-jitsu and whatnot. I've been following your work for a long time. It has just been a huge influence.

Matt: Thank you, Robb, I'm honored.

Robb: Absolutely, yeah. So, Peter, give us some background and also, can you tell us what the heck pedagogy is?

Peter: Sure. Before I start I will say that your work has influenced me. I have Crohn's disease and I read your first book and I felt so good once I followed that, particularly the grains and the wheats and such and decreased my carbs and sugar. That was a huge physical benefit to me, so, thank you for that.

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Robb: Fantastic, thank you. I guess a little bit in the vein of this whole paper and this discussion of critical thinking, my greasy used car salesman pitch around this stuff is, try it for 30 days, see how it works and then assess the cost-benefit ratio and see if it works for you. I hope it's going pretty well.

Peter: Yeah, it has been fantastic for me. Every once in a while, I have a passion for popcorn, and I go on a date with my wife and I have a box of popcorn. I wish I could have the fortitude to not do that because I never feel good afterward, although it's fun at the time.

Robb: I tell you, in the grand scheme of dalliances, that's not too bad, so I'll sign off on that one, no problem.

Peter: Okay, good, your affirmation makes me feel a lot better. So pedagogy is just a teaching method, a way of teaching, a way of instructing people. One of the things -- I've been training with Matt for years -- one of the things that Matt has taught is the importance of a resisting opponent. Matt was one of the people who originally talked about superstition in the martial arts and made some of those superstitious practices clear for what they are and that's, well, superstition. So there are many ways to look at that but in the paper it talks about kata. It's a form. People used to do that, as you know, for years and years. That was the way that people trained. The problem with that though is that there's no resisting opponent and so there's no relationship between doing kata and becoming a better fighter. In fact there may even be an inverse relationship between the two because the more you do kata and the cooler it looks, the better you think you can fight and then the more entrenched in your own delusions you become. So there's no corrective mechanism with kata, and that's exactly what we see in the academy and the ways things are taught, the way people memorize things, not engaging them.

As someone who has been practicing jiu-jitsu for a long time, what was interesting to me is if you forget about the art and you just look at the pedagogy, the teaching method, the method of instruction -- the method that Matt uses is the i-Method and he can talk about that in a second. I thought, why can't we use -- well, okay, even if we take a step back, if you forget about the arts, people who use certain teaching methods in combat arts, against resisting opponents, those people are always more successful than people who don't use certain teaching methods. So I thought to myself, well if this holds in the physical domain, why doesn't it hold in the cognitive domain when we certainly have indications that ways that we can correct our thinking would be not only helpful to us, but it seems that we could teach other people these things? All right, I saddle off there, so I'll pause before I go on.

Robb: No, no, that's it, that's fantastic. Maybe I can dovetail that into a little bit of the abstract. I'm reading from the paper. "This paper argues that training methodologies similar to those in Brazilian jiu-jitsu and other realistic combat sports like Western boxing, Muay Thai, kickboxing, and college wrestling should constitute a pedagogical core of college critical thinking courses. To make this argument, first, we briefly define and explain critical thinking using the American Philosophical Association's Delphi Report." Can you unpack a little bit about what

was in that report and what critical thinking is? It was pretty interesting how they delineated that and then also, you, in the paper, made some interesting observations about even though they maybe defined that process or that, yeah, I guess process is the right term for it, but there was really, in most of critical thinking courses and so many courses in general, there's very little nonritualistic training that occurs, ironically. There's not actually a progressive overload system for getting people to move through that process. It's very happenstance.

Peter: Yeah, and ironic is the perfect word because you're supposed to be teaching people how to think critically but you don't know if the content you're teaching them and the method of teaching actually achieves what you think it achieves, so there are layers of irony within that.

Robb: Absolutely. So could you talk a little bit about the Delphi Report and how they actually determine critical thinking?

Peter: Sure. It's actually a fascinating thing. It took them two years. They had experts from every field. What they would do is they would send out a questionnaire with a bunch of items. Do you think critical thinking is this, this, this? Then they had spaces, fill in what you think critical thinking is. They do that over multiple iterations until they receive a consensus. So the consensus from the experts was, and then it listed a consensus. But here's the interesting thing about that, and this is absolutely fascinating and applicable in every domain of our lives, socially, politically, morally, et cetera. They determined that critical thinking is two things. It's a skill set, and it's an attitude. In college classrooms, we teach the skill set, in other words, we teach kata, but we don't teach the attitude.

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So we teach, for example, how do I identify a fallacy and how to attach a label to the fallacy? Now this is ad hominem. This is attacking the person, A, B, C, D. But they don't teach a skill set. Here's an example of a skill, being willing to revise your beliefs. That's probably in my opinion. Being trustful of reason is another one. So let's take that and put it in a martial arts context. So if I came in here or someone came in here today and told that Matt -- and Matt is right next to me, he can tell you what he thinks -- if they said, "Matt, I have -- and I think I wrote about this in the paper -- I have a technique called the pinkie technique and I will use my pinkie to defeat your best opponents. Can we test that out?" What would you say to that?

Matt: Absolutely.

Robb: Let me get my GoPro and here's a waiver.

Peter: That's right. So, absolutely, you would test that out. So it's pretty easy to adjudicate these things in the physical realm. You just have someone who makes a claim. You match him against someone who is more or less the same weight, height, et cetera, et cetera. So in college classrooms, it's very easy to teach the skill set and it's very easy to assess that. That's the key thing. You just look at the multiple choice, et cetera, et cetera. But we don't teach the attitude. Most people don't even talk about the attitude. How do you help people to become more trustful of reason? How do you help them to revise their beliefs? How do you help them to have certain values?

The big insight that I had from teaching this for, I don't know, more than two decades is that the value has to perceive the skill set, that the value that teach people to have to, for example, revise their beliefs in the base of evidence, that they should value evidence. If people don't value that then they're not going to use the skill set for things that matter. It's like they're doing kata. Everybody in these classes, they're all doing kata and then they're congratulating themselves because their kata looks so good. But the kata doesn't apply to things in real life. One of my colleagues, when he read the paper, said, "Oh, that's like doing layups without a person." I mentioned that to Matt and he said, "No, it's like playing basketball without a basketball."

Robb: A ball, yeah, yeah.

Peter: That's why -- Matt has talked about this -- that's why when you see all these demonstrations, don't look at the person throwing people around like magic, look at the people coming at him. Look at the dummies. Look at the UKs or whatever you chose, the Japanese. Look at those people. Look at the theaters, not the actor.

Robb: Absolutely, absolutely. Matt, you really coined and have popularized this term, Aliveness and then Straight Blast Gym. I know methodologies like this have been out there, but you guys really formalized and codified this i-Method. Could you talk a little bit about that? We'll contextualize it within Brazilian jiu-jitsu and combatives and then maybe, Peter, we can pull this out and look at it from the perspective of a critical thinking class.

Matt: Sure. When I started, for whatever reason, I don't know the answer to this, so I'm not sure it matters, but from a very early age I was obsessed with what's real and what's not real in martial arts. By what's really, I mean, what's actually going to work, and that's what drew me to Jeet Kune Do concepts, original, and what I saw in that community as I was training those guys and teaching some of the arts were some of it was functional, some of it was not. Many of the arts were functional. Many of them were fantasy. You'd have a book like Absorb What Is Useful, for the old martial arts people out there, might remember that book by Dan Inosanto and Paul Vunak where they would demonstrate the differences

between the Jun Fan kickboxing in comparison to something like Shudokan. They'd have side by side comparisons with one being, of course, inferior by definition according to what they were writing down. At the same time, they were enamored with an art like Silat which, in many ways, made Shudokan look functional.

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So I'm watching this hypocrisy, and I notice that they don't understand how to think about martial arts. The question that would come up time and time again, to me, by sincere people, is, what arts work and what arts don't? Why does an art like Brazilian jiu-jitsu work so well and an art, for example, like Japanese jiu-jitsu, as it's typically taught, although it might contain the same moves and have the same techniques -- they could give you a Japanese name for most of the movements we do in Brazilian jiu-jitsu -- your typical white belt with three stripes from a BJJ class will run circles around a Japanese jiu-jitsu black belt, why is that? Rather than have to explain it step by the step, the one word answer I came up for that, with that is Aliveness. Aliveness is timing, energy and motion. Those are three words of the same thing which is aliveness, but if you're missing one of those elements then what you're doing is not alive. That gets misconstrued by people who say, "Well that's sparring." You have to explain a little bit deeper and because the immediate objection all throughout is, well you can't just throw people who are sparring, which of course we never have.

But what I'm really talking about Aliveness, I'm talking about how we train. A really simple example, so take it out of martial arts for a second, would be, I taught my daughter to teach badminton about a year ago. My wife brought home a badminton set, so it's the two rackets and the bird. I lobbed it at her. I showed her how to hold the racket, showed her how to swing it a couple of times, introduction stage. I lobbed the bird at her and she misses it. I do it a few more times, maybe a little slower, maybe a little closer, whatever I need to do, and eventually she managed to hit it with the racket and went way over on the other side of the grass. I had to pick it up and she hits it again. Pretty soon she's hitting it towards me and after about an hour, she was able to hit it to me and I was able to hit it back. That's aliveness. So I introduced the basic technique and then she's hitting something that's moving with timing, energy and motion, which was the bird, the ball of the badminton. If I was going to use a traditional martial arts training method, I would have her practice swinging the racket in the air, create a kata for her, correct her as she was doing it. It will be a long time before she ever maybe even saw a bird.

To me that is the secret of why some things work and some things don't in martial arts. In Brazilian jiu-jitsu, even if it's taught poorly, even if the instructor is a bad instructor, even if they don't understand much about drilling, a typical class is, here are some techniques, just random techniques I just like and now,

everybody, let's roll and try to kill each other, which isn't that uncommon, but even in that environment, people will learn how to do jiu-jitsu because they're working against a resisting opponent. This is where it dovetails with philosophy. I heard Daniel Dennett talk about this years ago where he talked about the opponent process. Anytime result is bad, we go to a meritocratic format, and we're going to have competition, whether it's business or military results or sports results, and that's why combat sports has always been functional because they care about the results, whether it's wrestling or Brazilian jiu-jitsu. That's why those are the arts you see in the UFC.

That's the same thing with science. Science, in a way, is a rigorous form of competition. It has an opponent process. When it's working correctly, whatever hypotheses or experiments or papers that you have, have to be presented in front of equal peers, your peers, worthy competition where they're going to try and tear it down. It's only the ideas and experiments that survive that process ultimately that should make it to become published, and still those conclusions are always open to revision, as are ours. What you're finding there is a measurement that's likely to admit to ever increasing complexity. When I do a rear naked choke, there's a proper way to do it. There are worse ways and better ways to do it, but I'm still open to finding more efficient ways to do it. The better you get at it, by definition, the more efficient you get. There's an ever increasing complexity to it, but it's still an empirical process. So that's where it all ties together with Aliveness philosophy.

Robb: I love that explanation. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I would see that as an iterative process also which I think really throws a lot of people off. There's this assumption -- I had a question later which maybe we'll address this now to some degree, but is there something in the human psyche, like some of our evolutionary past that we really put things into a black and white context, and that's our reactive default mode and then understanding that life and science and combatives can and should be an iterative process that we're going to learn new things over time and there will be refinements? That seems to be a very prickly, uncomfortable experience for a lot of people.

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Matt: I'm going to let Pete answer that, but one thing I'll say that I learned from Pete's work, because over the years I've gone into his classes, I've watched him teach his Critical Thinking classes, and people have -- it's surprising to me because sometimes I'm always afraid I'm trafficking common sense because everything I'm teaching seems to me like common sense. It always has. But then I watch him teach his class and people become very confused over simple things like difference between a subjective and an objective question, whether or not they can get on long arguments about whether or not we should have chairs in our room. I'll grant you, people can come from different cultures and have different

reasons why there should or should not be chairs in the room. But if you say there are chairs in the room and I say there are no chairs in the room, one of us is wrong. When it comes to physical martial arts, it's an empirical science in the sense that there are better ways to do things. It's not all arts have something good. No. Some things will make your worse as a fighter, and some things will make you better. The questions about fighting are questions about whether or not there are chairs, not whether or not there should be chairs. Until people can understand that and understand how to think critically, sometimes I think they can become very confused.

Peter: Yeah, I want to piggyback off of a couple of things Matt said. I'm sure you and your listeners have seen those movies in which -- you know the horse stances?

Robb: Yes.

Peter: Okay, so there are hundreds and hundreds of people in horse stances and they're, "Hoo, hoo, hoo!" They're punching -- are you familiar with --

Robb: Oh, yeah, the opening of, I think, Enter the Dragon has something like that.

Peter: There you go. Okay, so there's no aliveness in there. There's no timing, energy and motion. What people think it's going to do for them, it is simply not going to do for them. That exact thing you see there in the physical domain is what's happening in classrooms, in general, and specifically in Critical Thinking classrooms in general. It's all the self-congratulatory kata silliness in which people think that they're learning these skills. They're really not learning the skills. I mean, people are learning the skill of being "better" at what it means to be in a horse stance and delivering a head punch, but in terms of its applicability, there's no applicability. The thing that's worse is that it's even self-congratulatory at the stage above that in that it's either, oh, yes, look at this, look at how well our students do kata, look at how well people can get into horse a stance and punch. But have you ever seen anybody in the UFC get in a horse stance and start punching? If you have, what is the result of that?

Robb: I do see some wacky stuff back in the 1993 time that got weeded out quite quickly, yeah.

Peter: Yeah, exactly. So what I'm arguing for is that we need to be more mindful of -- first of all, we need to be more humble about what it is that we think we're teaching if you're an educator and you're attempting to teach Critical Thinking because it's not clear to me that -- in fact it's pretty clear to me that there is no evidence that knowing the name of the fallacy in Latin is going to help students in any way whatsoever but beyond that, we need to incorporate these elements of Aliveness with the i-Method exactly the way Matt talked just about introducing it to his daughter. Here's a huge thought. If we could move to this

practical level then I think we could shift people's attitudes. That's a weird thought, but -- and I'm going to ask Matt to jump in, in a second -- but let's say that you practice an art that you're engaging in behaviors that think make you a better fighter and they don't make you a better fighter and then you rise up in the ranks. Jump in here, Matt. Over time, that would make the people the top dicks, right?

Matt: Well I'll give you a perfect example. Robb, you've been around the Brazilian jiu-jitsu community for a long time too. In any community you're going to have people who are going to be assholes. There are certainly people who are dicks in the jiu-jitsu community, but by and large, having traveled around the world, I've been to a lot of competitions and that kind of thing, most of the people that do our sport and do what we do, tend to be pretty nice people. The competitors, especially the ones who compete the most, tend to oftentimes be some of the most humble people in the art, people like Marcelo Garcia and people like that, because obviously they gain a sense of true confidence, confidence based on their actual ability to perform a skill set. You can't fake being good at Brazilian jiu-jitsu any more than I can fake speaking Spanish or being able to play the guitar.

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But in an art like Aikido or in an art like Wing Chun or some of these other arts that are fancy-based where they're always dealing without a fully alive opponent but with a cooperating opponent in a form of choreography or two-person patterns, you can pretend to be very good and then over time you can create a personality or a persona that you are forced to live up to which you know somewhere, I think most of these guys know deep down, that is not authentic and that doesn't tend to have good effects on people's personalities. Some of the biggest douchebags I've met have been in Aikido schools, places like that. You walk in and there's so much arrogance. It's obvious to me why there's so much -- again, I'm painting with a broad brush -- oftentimes there's so much arrogance because what they're doing is make believe. At a certain point after a certain number of years, you're going to figure that out. The ones that don't know are the ones who are willing to test it.

Peter: Let me piggyback on that. That's why, Robb, you need -- what you see in these "fake" arts is extra rigmarole, bowing and master and all this silliness. You need this because that makes up for the differential between one's actual ability and one's perceived ability. You need to set these hierarchical, ritualistic practices to embed deference to the master because the whole thing is built on a house of cards. Same thing with religion, by the way, very similar process that happens with religion.

Robb: It's funny, when I look at, say, engineering, particularly electrical and mechanical engineering, and I look over at medicine; medicine is, the research generally occurs as the process moves forward. It looks more like some sort of witchcraft or voodoo or something versus what the engineers have going on. The pecking order and hierarchy and structure and reticence to really call foul on stuff that's not working is really pretty amazing but yet these are clearly some very bright, educated people. I don't know if this is just a story of, as things get more complex, it's a bit more difficult to pin things down, but it has been interesting to me when I look out at, say, nutritional science which is the area that I'm in, when you get an engineer that starts looking at this stuff, say, multiple people -- person has a spouse who develops Type 1 diabetes. They don't like the way it's being managed, seems like it's just a mess, they get in and really learn the physiology and the biochemistry and they're like, oh, we're going to do a lower carb diet and we're going to have much better results with these. But it's this iterative process and the training that engineers go through. I just don't see many engineers that end up adopting, say, a mega high carb, low protein type of eating program. It's interesting, there seems to be this attractor that pulls it all towards this one area. Do you guys think that that's part of the difference in the training of an engineer versus someone who goes into medicine? Is it a complexity story? Why is there such a gap there? Then maybe additionally, Matt, do you see almost from an employment or work history background, are engineers disproportionately inclined to be jiu-jitsu practitioners, whereas maybe somebody who is in a different field maybe more inclined to some of this fantasy martial arts stuff?

Matt: That's interesting, yeah. Definitely with engineers, John Kavanagh has a degree in engineering and a lot of the black belts I can think of have degrees in engineering or backgrounds in engineering. There's something about thinking like an engineer I think that blends itself well with jiu-jitsu because they're able to think about structure and weight and carrying weight and leveraging things like that, in a way that I think is really productive. I can't really speak to the difference in nutritional science except to say, to state the obvious that a lot of it has to do with the incentives over the years and who is funding a lot of that research. As opposed to engineering where Boeing wants to absolutely make sure those planes are flying well, they have good incentive to make sure they get the next momentary...

Robb: No, I like that. I really like that. I probably, ten times a day, there's some, either external or internal thought about, well if the incentives were better aligned, we wouldn't have these problems.

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Peter: Yeah, I wonder whether the corollary to that question is that those people who have studied academic disciplines that are basically silly or things that have been

influenced by post-modernism, if they're less likely to do Brazilian jiu-jitsu because their intellectual lives are based on fantasy to begin with.

Robb: Well, and that was another question that I had floating around in here is there definitely seems to be a looking down the nose, a perception of low brow attributes to things like judo and boxing and wrestling and whatnot. Before we started recording, I had mentioned that there are some interesting neuroscience studies that suggested risk assessment, risk analysis that we all hopefully develop over time actually starts from physical movement. Is jumping from this wet stone to that wet stone a good idea based off of my last experience of doing that? We've tried to develop this absolutely, perfectly safe environment and then what we're finding is that kids are terrible as they become adolescents and adults, at applying any type of, again, critical thinking but on that risk analysis side. So there definitely seems to be a reticence to value that physical struggle and also just competition at a really fundamental level.

Peter: Do you want to take that?

Matt: Yes. It ties into a piece that you asked about earlier which was combat training. I've heard all the arguments in the last 25 years against Aliveness, and one of the most common ones is, well you guys do sports and we're training for the street or we're training for self-defense. It's similar to what you're talking about where people are looking down on their nose, breathing down their nose at some of the combat sports as more low brow or low tech or however they view it, but that's, of course, backwards. The thing I try to point out to them is, listen, if this is how somebody who is going into a grappling competition or going into a cage needs to train in order to survive and learn their skill set, how much more important is it for somebody who is trying to hang onto their handgun when the stakes are even that much higher? Do you want to give them an inferior training method?

Peter: That's why it's backward.

Matt: That's why it's backwards. Because in the end, when I talk about Aliveness, I'm talking about epistemology. It's a training method. What distinguishes Aikido from Brazilian jiu-jitsu is the training method, and that training method works. The training method transcends technique, and it transcends environment. I use that training method to teach someone how to escape a headlock. I'm going to use that exact same functional training method to teach someone how to hang onto their handgun. At the core of it, when people fail to realize that -- I mean, part of it is just that there's so much misinformation out there, I think a lot of people are just sincerely misinformed and don't know. Once they've seen those arguments and it has been presented to them and there's a reticence, I think it's mostly a question of sincerity. If you look at the arts nowadays -- I wrote an essay not too long ago about Systema, and the video that I posted which was

quickly taken down after the essay went out, I just found another one, but it was truly ridiculous. It was one of the most ridiculous-looking things. Again, it's one of those things that made a lot of the hard styles of karate look really functional by comparison. You think to yourself, why would anybody fall for this? Yet it's the biggest of all the goofy martial arts out there. It's probably the most popular one right now.

I realized the whole magic bullet idea which is what these people who, even despite knowing better, still find themselves attracted to something as ridiculous as Systema, part of the key to that is that it doesn't look like the rest of martial arts. If it looked like something that you could do at MMA, they would think to themselves, oh, that's just MMA stuff. They want something that looks different. They want something that looks like it comes out of Matrix or comes out of a movie because that's really what's motivating them, so when they see these arts that actually look that ridiculous, that's part of their selling point to that clientele is the fact that it doesn't look like something you'd actually be able to pull off in a cage. So it goes back to your field there. If I see someone who is grossly overweight and they're talking to me about self-defense and they're talking to me about combatives, it's very hard for me to take them seriously just because I know what the action or their table looks like. Especially here in the United States, you're a lot more likely to die of heart attack or of cancer. Half of us will die from heart attacks and cancer than you are to be stabbed to death in a back alley somewhere. So what are they really motivated by? They're motivated by the image of being someone who is good at violence which is another issue related to masculinity that they haven't come to grips with and guess where they can learn about how to deal with that. In a combat sport. So not only will they learn how to fight, but they would actually be able to deal with the underlying problem.

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Robb: In a safe, progressive --

Matt: The maturity, the problem that they have.

Robb: Right, right. You alluded to this at the beginning that you were surprised that your methodology and your gym and your organization have been successful because -- and you've talked about this so much -- people would say that folks didn't want this Alive type of training but there is a way to do it that's not brutal. I mean, it's hard. It's always hard, but it's doable. There's a way to make it scaled and progressive so that literally anybody at any point in life can get in and start making forward progress.

Peter: Yeah, before we talk about that, let me just go back to something you said about the study and the physicality. I took my daughter to the playground the other

day, and the playground we went to is one of these newly constructed playgrounds. I don't know if you've seen these things if you have kids.

Robb: Yes.

Peter: Okay. It was just this safe space, if you will. It was totally safe. You would really have to be creative and work to hurt yourself. Okay, first of all, I think that that is an example of a manifestation of a value that I happen to think is a good one, in general, and that is we're moving towards safety. We're moving towards -- when I was a kid, never did we drive with seat belts. I never had helmets when I rode my bike, none of that stuff. I do think that that's important and that shows a value of life. I also think it has a consequence. The consequence, and I'll now relate that to Brazilian jiu-jitsu in a second, the consequence is -- let's take the most extreme example. Do you ever watch Star Trek?

Robb: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. I'll admit it openly, yeah.

Peter: All right, my wife assures me that my Encyclopedic knowledge of Start Trek is -- or science fiction in general -- is not something to be proud of. Okay, so imagine if you lived your whole life in a holodeck or the [audio cut out] protocols are on. You would not have any idea what an actual risk -- you couldn't assess any risk because you'd never get hurt, right? Hello?

Robb: You're falling out just a little bit.

Peter: Yeah, you guys are falling out too. So if you lived in a holodeck your whole life, you'd have no way to make a risk assessment, right?

Robb: Right.

Peter: Okay, so if you play on playgrounds all the time, you'd have no way to make an actual risk assessment in these super new playgrounds, right?

Robb: Right.

Peter: Okay, so let's pull from that. We can pull many lessons from that. One of the things I think that, piggybacking off of what Matt said and his manuscript is about this now, is about having a healthy relationship to violence. A part of that is the understanding of what you cannot do. I think we've seen all these movies with Jeff Speakman and these guys who take on Steven Seagal, people with bats and knives. It's just ridiculous. It is just a fantasy, but I would go beyond fantasy. I would say it's an extremely dangerous thing to teach people that they can somehow be the hero in their own reality that they've constructed for themselves when it comes to violence.

Robb: Right.

Peter: Yes? Okay, so what we see in this is the value to protect people and physically makes them more likely to hurt themselves because they can't make reasonable assessments of risk conditions. I think the same thing is operating in the cognitive domain. Safe spaces, the value to protect people from ideas; it makes them more brittle and less likely to assess situations and use reason to solve those problems. That's why, I think, in my opinion at least, a lot of these issues can be addressed through Brazilian jiu-jitsu, through the i-Method, through Aliveness and through that type of training because it teaches you corrective mechanisms. It teaches you how to use feedback. It teaches you what works and what doesn't. It teaches you what your limitations are. There are very few things that I can think of that has such a comprehensive -- maybe it's figure of my imagination, but it's not downhill skiing, it's not race [audio cut out] although those elements are certainly present in that.

[0:40:21]

Robb: Right.

Peter: So I think the long and the short of it is that just in the physical domain, we can [audio cut out] and think about things that are helpful. We can do some of the cognitive domain and if you're an educator, you can teach individuals and groups of students how to value things like making accurate assessment of risks.

Matt: Yeah, to your point, you were talking about earlier, Aliveness is for everybody. One of the other objections that I run into against it that is pretty common is, well, Aliveness is just for young people. Aliveness is for athletes. You can't do that when you're older. That dovetails sometimes into another one that will appear which is, while those combat sports are cool when you're young but when you get older, you need Tai Chi or Aikido or something like that. That's not just wrong, it's backwards. First of all, this is for everybody. One of my black belts, you probably know Lily Pagle, she's 63 now I believe. She started training with me when she was 50. She's a legitimate, dangerous black belt. You make a mistake, and she's going to choke you or take your arm. She's on the mat all the time, training, 63. We have students in my gym now that are in their mid to late-60s. We have kids as young as four. My daughters are in class. If there is any better method to do something as a young man then I'm going to need that even more when I'm older. If there was a better method of fighting when you're older, I would use it as a young man. So there's such misapplication of logic there. People don't think through it.

I think about this especially in the context of my daughters. When it comes to practical self-defense, in addition to getting healthy and getting in better shape, and that's going to help them in self-preservation in ways that are far more

practical especially in the United States where most people then, hand to hand combat. But in addition to that, just being comfortable with someone putting their hands on you and someone trying to hold you down and the pushing and the pulling and the physicality of jiu-jitsu is so much more important than whether or not you know how to poke someone in the eye or knee them in the groin. Kids, after a very short time, anyone, after very short time with jiu-jitsu, they start to become comfortable with that, having someone grab them and trying to roll them to the ground or hold them down. For a lot of people that is the single most important thing because that is the thing that if they ever should need it, it's going to help push them through, past the point where they might otherwise freeze because they're used to, now, physical contact. I have a whole bunch of people, unless they're somebody that played a lot of contact sports as a youth, there's a whole bunch of people walking around who are not used to that kind of physical contact. When you put your hands on them, you feel it. You can feel that fear, and that's totally normal. That's not something you should be ashamed of. They can become acclimated to that in a jiu-jitsu class in a way that is so healthy, especially I think -- not for everyone -- especially, in particular my daughters. I want them to be used to that physicality too.

Peter: And they have a realistic assessment, and they know what they can and can't do with that.

Matt: It's all illusions about what they can do and what they can't do. One of my black belts, my main coach at my gym, Amanda Loewen or Amanda Diggins now, she's a gold medal black belt competitor, and she's very, very good. She's also absolutely aware, probably more than almost anyone in the world, about what it feels like to roll with a strong man who also knows what she knows and what her body is capable of and what her body is not capable of. She's far less likely to burst up in situations that are dangerous, let alone, the way she carries herself, because of her training, in a way that makes her unlikely to be selected by a predator. Even if she was, in addition to all her fighting skills, she carries with her all that, almost, primal knowledge, as Chris Haueter would say, and that's invaluable.

Robb: Being a father of two girls, I'm excited that both girls are super interested in Brazilian jiu-jitsu. I've been holding some pads for them and showing them a little bit of Thai boxing. They love it. It has been all play-based so far, but I'm excited to see them progress through this whole thing.

Matt: Yeah, that's awesome.

Robb: Yeah. Well, guys, I want to be respectful of your time and so I want to have folks know where they can find you on the Internet. But, Matt, I've got one final question for you. I'm asked all the time, what should one look for in a Brazilian

jiu-jitsu gym? I have some thoughts on that, but I would much prefer hearing your thoughts on that.

[0:45:03]

Matt: That's a good question. I would make sure that I feel comfortable. Trust your gut about whether or not you feel comfortable. Then I would watch a class or participate in one, and I would want to see a mat that had a lot of different people on it. So no matter what night you show up or day you show up here in my gym here in Portland, you're going to find women on the mat, you're going to find men on the mat, you're going to find younger people, older people, so it doesn't look like a roomful of 23-year-old athletes. There's nothing wrong with having a gym for 23-year-old athletes, but if you're not a 23-year-old athlete and you're just looking to measure yourself against other 23-year-old athletes and you want to join a jiu-jitsu school that's going to teach you the skill in an environment where you won't get hurt, in an environment where you enjoy it because the bottom line is, if you don't enjoy it, you're not going to keep doing it. The name of the game here is not quit because it takes a decade to get good at jiu-jitsu, at the very least. Look around, do you see a lot of different types of people, older, younger, male, female all training together, all having a good time, all friendly? If someone is honest with themselves and they walk into a class and they look around and they see that, it's probably a good school.

Robb: I love it. I love it. Matt --

Matt: What was -- I'm sorry, go ahead.

Robb: I know, Matt, you have a book coming out in not too long and also, where can folks track you down in the Internet?

Matt: Yes, I've been working on that for a long time, but I hope to have it done by the end of the year. They can track me down either, for martial arts, they can track down the organization that's straightblastgym.com, and for my essays and writing at mattthornton.org.

Robb: Okay, and I'll get all that in the show notes. Peter, where can folks track you down?

Peter: Just Twitter is my current one, I've been pretty busy with my current book, [@peterboghossian](https://twitter.com/peterboghossian).

Robb: Okay, okay, I'll get all that stuff in the show notes. Guys, thank you again for coming on the show, thank you also for accommodating my wacky schedule. I'm pretty convinced my wife is trying to work me to death by buying a small farm. I

think her plan is for me to die and then she'll get a younger, better-looking husband at the end of that whole thing, so I apologize for the wacky schedule.

Peter: Well, our absolute pleasure.

Matt: Our pleasure.

Peter: Nice talking to you, thanks, and thanks for your work.

Robb: Thanks, guys, we'll talk to you soon.

Matt: Thanks, bye-bye.

Robb: Bye-bye.

[0:47:24] End of Audio