

# Ari Wallach

**Executive Director, Longpath**

*Ari ben Zion Wallach is a futurist and social systems strategist. He is the founder and Executive Director of Longpath Labs, an initiative focused on bringing long-term thinking and coordinated behavior to the individual, organizational, and societal realms in order to ensure humanity flourishes on an ecologically thriving planet Earth for centuries to come. Wallach was also the founder and CEO of Synthesis Corp., a New York-based strategic innovation consultancy whose clients included CNN, Volkswagen Global, The UN Refugee Agency and the US State Department. Wallach was the co-founder of the 2008 presidential initiative “The Great Schlep with Sarah Silverman” and hosted Fast Company magazine’s Fast Company Futures with Ari Wallach. He is adjunct associate professor at Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs, lecturing on innovation, AI and the futures of governance and public policy.*

*As an expert in looking at systems and issues across hundreds of years—instead of just a few months—Ari has a viewpoint on Longevity and Equity that forces new perspectives. He asked us to consider:*

## **Individual or Civilizational?**

The first step is reframing the questions we ask around Longevity and Equity. If we begin from a place in which we measure the quality and length of an individual’s life or that of our own, we set in motion a conversation ultimately no different from the ones we have always had. Instead, Ari’s approach requires us to zoom out and look at ourselves not during a single lifetime but as a civilization over multiple lifetimes. This perspective forces us to ask hard, painful, and disruptive questions and will ultimately shift how we define education, business, how we work, and how we live. It drives a deeper analysis of our ethos and our cultural values, formed over centuries. For example, as a civilization, do we have the

compassion and empathy to make the changes to reduce the gap in equity?

## **The Value of Agency**

With this expanded framework, we now focus in on what Ari sees as fundamental to our issue of inequity: our need to feel like we have control over our lives. One of the many results from prolonged inequity is an actual or perceived loss of agency, which has a long-term impact on health, and feeds directly into the growing Longevity gap. A painful example of this is the transition from factory + manufacturing employment to hourly work in retail and restaurants. For the latter, innovations that help improve business efficiency by analyzing data unfortunately make for a work environment that is difficult for workers to predict. Algorithms determine peak consumer need in close to real time. This means workers are notified only days before they are scheduled to work. That shift in staff planning, while seemingly minor, over time exacerbates an already strong sense of lapsed control by workers.

## **The Root of Capitalism**

Business needs to innovate and become more efficient. And, if we are honest, notes Ari, inequity is a “feature” in the “product” of capitalism. The model is built for some to succeed while others don’t. We can try to adjust the output of capitalism in the ways we have for decades, or we can dig down into the root. Ari believes we can stay true to the fundamental model of capitalism, as it will not be going away, and instead integrate it with two components that, in addressing a better civilization, can ensure more equity: Transgenerational Empathy and Total Human Flourishing.

## **The Power of Wisdom**

Ari asserts that wisdom is an accumulation; an understanding of what to value in life over what has value. What we

experience in life—the tragedies and the joys—fuse into wisdom in the later chapters of our lives. The empathy borne from this process is infused into the generations that follow ours as we demonstrate that wisdom to our children. We must celebrate and elevate this process to balance the natural inequity of late-stage capitalism. Western society today does little to honor its elders and capture their wisdom. If the Longevity gap continues, then those without equity will be lost entirely in this passing of knowledge.

### **Fostering Connections**

How we flourish as human beings, Ari explains, is in our ability to connect and thrive in the community in which we live. Ideally, we would all be on even footing as we start our life path. As a civilization, we are best serving a successful capitalist model when we share common access to our systemic needs as children—local and equal education, food sources, healthcare services—and then are given the space to become the people we are meant to be. This could manifest as older adults advocating for universal Pre-K; for example, disabled Americans fighting for curb modifications for wheelchairs, resulting in improved experiences for many people in their communities—parents with strollers, older adults with walkers—and consequently improving overall walkability.