

*The Global Chorus question is as follows: “Do you think that humanity can find a way past the current global environmental and social crises? Will we be able to create the conditions necessary for our own survival, as well as that of other species on the planet? What would these conditions look like? In summary, then, and in the plainest of terms, do we have hope, and can we do it?”*

Some historical perspective: Up until 500 years ago you, as a citizen, would understand the world through the words of an authority figure. It could be a king or an emperor, or perhaps a religious leader in charge of a rigid system of permissible thoughts, questions and actions. Your authority figure would lack any real understanding of the world, but he (and it was almost always a “he”) would point to the writings of the ancients, perhaps to Aristotle, to Confucius, or to something in the bible, as the ultimate basis of his authority. Nobody could see the world clearly under those circumstances.

Since then most authoritarian political and religious systems have cracked, allowing our two great inventions of modern science and practical democracy to blossom. The all-wise leader is replaced by the idea that truth can best be found through insightful observation, accompanied by critical reasoning and free thought. The world still has religion, and a few fading dictatorships persist, but there is no serious doubt that science and democracy are transcendent.

So, 500 years ago I would have doubted our chances for the future, but today I am extremely optimistic. For the first time in recorded history, our eyes are open to the world, giving us enormous power both to appreciate its beauty and to identify and address its problems. We have never been more perceptive, more powerful, or more capable. We have never been better placed to determine our own future on this planet than we are now.

David Jewitt, Los Angeles, 2012 October