Crafting sustainable societies and confronting climate change are two of the grand challenges of today and the foreseeable future. This talk will explore the basic messages that seem to get lost in today’s polarized rhetoric around these topics, including the limitations that physics places upon our choices and our options, the challenges of communicating to the public topics that mix science and society, and the ethical issues that may ultimately shape the debate. We will explore some of the latest findings on abrupt climate changes seen in ice cores, and then conclude with why facing this challenge may be one of the best things humans ever did to benefit ourselves.