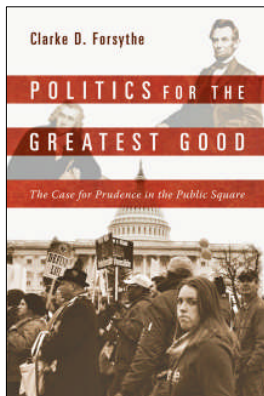


# Q&A

## AUTHOR INTERVIEW



With a level-headed voice, leading policy strategist Clarke Forsythe speaks clearly into the fray of political striving. In *Politics for the Greatest Good* he campaigns for a recovery of a rich understanding of the virtue of prudence, and for its application by policymakers and citizens to contemporary public policy.

*Politics for the Greatest Good*, 304 pages, paperback, \$23, 978-0-8308-2922-4, May 2009

### Why did you write *Politics for the Greatest Good*?

**Clarke Forsythe:** I have a desire to recover the cardinal—and biblical—virtue of prudence as a way of thinking about morality and politics. I also wanted to help politically interested Catholics and evangelicals evaluate politics and public policy in prudential terms.

### What exactly is prudence as it pertains to politics?

**Forsythe:** Essentially, prudence is practical wisdom, and involves making good decisions and implementing them well. Prudence requires discernment, deliberation, decision and execution. As applied to politics, prudence asks four questions of political leaders, activists and citizens:

1. Are we pursuing good goals?
2. Are we exercising wise judgment as to what's possible?
3. Do we successfully apply means to ends?
4. Do we preserve the possibility of future progress when the ideal cannot be immediately achieved?

In this political season, many evangelicals and Catholics are frustrated by politics and a perceived lack of progress. Prudence is necessary to have more realistic expectations of politics, to improve the prospects for political change and to succeed with political reform.

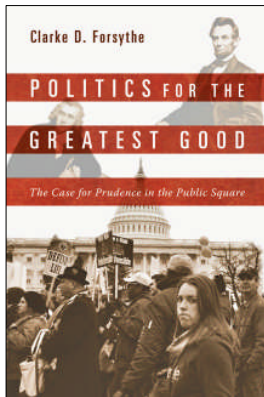
### What is the central point of *Politics for the Greatest Good*?

**Forsythe:** *Politics for the Greatest Good* attempts to resolve the historic debate between “purists” and “incrementalists” through an ethical, historical and legal examination of the cardinal virtue of prudence. It seeks to instill confidence in legislators and policy groups (including religious believers) that a prudential approach to public policy—which strives for the greatest good possible when the ideal cannot be achieved—is both moral and effective.

For example, the pro-life movement in America has been plagued for forty years by discord over the morality of “imperfect” or “incremental” legislation that limits unjust laws and conditions when complete prohibition is not possible. This is exemplified by division over South Dakota’s 2006 prohibition on abortion and over the federal partial-birth abortion law. Some have described it as an “all-or-nothing” strategy versus an “all-or-something” strategy.

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## AUTHOR INTERVIEW



*“Prudence is necessary to have more realistic expectations of politics, to improve the prospects for political change and to succeed with political reform.”*

Based on my twenty-three years of experience in the courts and state legislatures, *Politics for the Greatest Good* defends the morality and effectiveness of an “all-or-something” approach to public policy. It is an ethical and philosophical evaluation of the need for prudence in public policy and includes two chapters on the prudential strategies of William Wilberforce and Abraham Lincoln. It concludes with two “application” chapters relating to abortion and biotechnology.

**What do you hope readers take away from *Politics for the Greatest Good*?**

**Forsythe:**

- The aim of politics is not the perfect good but the greatest good possible.
- When it’s not possible to completely prohibit a social evil, it’s right and just to put fences around the social evil and limit it as much as possible.
- There are historical examples—like the American founders, William Wilberforce and Abraham Lincoln—that show the effectiveness and justice of attempting to fence in a social evil when complete prohibition is not possible, as a good in itself and as an effective means to achieve greater justice.
- Prudence, as a virtue and a means of reasoning about politics, needs to be brought back into our political discussions to help us have more reasonable expectations about what can and should be accomplished in politics and to achieve the greatest good possible in politics.