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Spring 2020

## The Life and Legacy of James I, King of England

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# The Life and Legacy of James I, King of England

## Abstract

As the first member of the Stuart line to hold the Kingdoms of England, Ireland, and Scotland under his suzerainty, the life and reign of King James I was always going to mark a serious turning point in the histories of the lands under his control. The Tudors, who had dominated English politics, religion, and culture since the end of the War of the Roses, had been extinguished with the death of the childless Queen Elizabeth I. Their successors, the Stuarts, would find that their personal rule over the British Isles would mark some of the most defining moments in not only British political, cultural, and religious history, but that of the wider Western world as well. James I, the progenitor of this impactful tenure, would have a lasting influence on the reigns through both his life and his work. A monarch of scholarly persuasion, James I has left the historical record a number of personal works on political philosophy, theology, and proper monarchical conduct. Not content merely to rule while others debated political theory, James I was a very active and important participant in many of the philosophical debates over the role of a monarch in a commonwealth that raged through the early modern period in Europe. While the importance and impact of James I's political philosophy can be seen immediately in his own reign, the ideas which he advanced and the lessons he imparted to his heirs clearly set the stage for the next hundred years of British history. Although the early Jacobean era often seems to be overlooked in the historical records in favor of the events surrounding the English Civil War, it is imperative to understanding James I's life and legacy in order to explain the tumultuous events that would follow. James I's prolificity as a writer has left contemporary historians with a number of important literary works and primary sources that help the chart both his personal history and the history of the kingdoms which he ruled. Chief among these documents are James I's *Basilikon Doron*, *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies* (hereafter referred to as "*The True Law of Free Monarchies*" or "*The True Law*"), and his speech to Parliament in 1603. These three works each present primary source evidence of James I's importance as a historical figure and, taken together, they are providential in understanding many of the dominant political, religious, and cultural issues of the Stuart era. By combining James I's own words and works with more contemporary historical analyses of his reign and the context in which he was acting, the significance of James I's life and legacy becomes truly apparent.

## Keywords

England, Early Modern, James I

## Disciplines

European History | History

## Comments

Written for HIST 314: Early Modern Europe.

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Nick Arbaugh

4.29.2020

HIST 314 – Early Modern Europe

Professor Sanchez

Final Research Paper

*The Life and Legacy of  
James I, King of England*

I affirm that I have upheld the highest principles of honesty and integrity in my academic work and have not witnessed a violation of the Honor Code.

Signed           *Nicholas S. Arbaugh*

## I. Introduction

As the first member of the Stuart line to hold the Kingdoms of England, Ireland, and Scotland under his suzerainty, the life and reign of King James I was always going to mark a serious turning point in the histories of the lands under his control. The Tudors, who had dominated English politics, religion, and culture since the end of the War of the Roses, had been extinguished with the death of the childless Queen Elizabeth I. Their successors, the Stuarts, would find that their personal rule over the British Isles would mark some of the most defining moments in not only British political, cultural, and religious history, but that of the wider Western world as well. James I, the progenitor of this impactful tenure, would have a lasting influence on the reigns through both his life and his work. A monarch of scholarly persuasion, James I has left the historical record a number of personal works on political philosophy, theology, and proper monarchical conduct.<sup>1</sup> Not content merely to rule while others debated political theory, James I was a very active and important participant in many of the philosophical debates over the role of a monarch in a commonwealth that raged through the early modern period in Europe. While the importance and impact of James I's political philosophy can be seen immediately in his own reign, the ideas which he advanced and the lessons he imparted to his heirs clearly set the stage for the next hundred years of British history. Although the early Jacobean era often seems to be overlooked in the historical records in favor of the events surrounding the English Civil War, it is imperative to understanding James I's life and legacy in order to explain the tumultuous events that would follow. James I's prolificacy as a writer has left

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<sup>1</sup> James I, *The Political Works of James I*, ed. Charles Howard McIlwain (New York: Russel & Russel Incorporated, 1965), LIV; Jane Rickard, "The Writings of King James VI and I and Early Modern Literary Culture," *Literature Compass* 9, no. 10 (October 2012): 654-655, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2012.00914.x>; Lisa Rosner and John Theibault, *A Short History of Europe, 1600-1815: Search for a Reasonable World* (Routledge 2015), 97-98.

contemporary historians with a number of important literary works and primary sources that help the chart both his personal history and the history of the kingdoms which he ruled. Chief among these documents are James I's *Basilikon Doron*, *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies* (hereafter referred to as "*The True Law of Free Monarchies*" or "*The True Law*"), and his speech to Parliament in 1603.<sup>2</sup> These three works each present primary source evidence of James I's importance as a historical figure and, taken together, they are providential in understanding many of the dominant political, religious, and cultural issues of the Stuart era. By combining James I's own words and works with more contemporary historical analyses of his reign and the context in which he was acting, the significance of James I's life and legacy becomes truly apparent.

## **II. Theory**

One of the most identifiable aspects of James I's reign was the introduction of the "divine right" theory of monarchical rule into the English political lexicon. This theory of government would come to define many of the intergovernmental struggles that England would endure in the coming years, and throughout the reigns of the Stuart monarchs.<sup>3</sup> It is thus fitting that such an important, history-defining theory would be championed by none other than the monarch himself. Far from merely acting as an absolute monarch cloaked in some sort of religious pretense, James Stuart's *The True Law of Free Monarchies* demonstrates clearly that he wholeheartedly believed in a monarch's divine right to rule. Not only did he believe in it, but he was so convinced of it that he was willing to write a comprehensive political treatise in defense

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<sup>2</sup> *The Political Works of James I*, while edited together, is still preserved in the vernacular in which it was first written. Many words or phrases contain significantly different spelling than their modern counterparts. Thus, any quotations used in this paper are edited, with altered words appearing in their modern forms between parentheses despite their meanings being unadulterated.

<sup>3</sup> Rosner and Theibault, *History of Europe*, 97.

of it and have it published for a general audience.<sup>4</sup> According to historian Lori Ferrell, James “stands alone in the history of English monarchs as a prolific author” who considered the denizens of his kingdoms as subjects for persuasion through works like *The True Law*.<sup>5</sup> It is within *The True Law* that James I’s sharp theoretical ability becomes readily apparent.

From the outset of the tract, James establishes his theoretical basis for how a government ought to be run. He asserts that monarchy “as resembling (Divinity), approacheth (sic) nearest to perfection, as all the learned and wise men from the beginning (have) agreed (upon)...” and then goes on to expand on the religious backing for a monarchy.<sup>6</sup> Citing King David in the Bible, James reports that it is not without reason that kings are called Gods, for they are representatives of God on Earth and have a duty to God to rule justly. Just as the kings have a duty to rule and to maintain their nation’s allegiance to God, James also makes the argument that God bestows a duty on the people to keep their allegiance to their monarch. This latter point he describes as “the (true) grounds of the (mutual duty), and (allegiance) betwixt a free and absolute (Monarch) and his people.”<sup>7</sup> In James I’s theory, both the people of a country and their king were both bound by divine law to carry out their specific duty. The people are as bound to follow the laws promulgated by a king as they are the laws promulgated by God through the Bible. In essence, James does not see a king’s word as merely temporal law, but almost spiritual law as well.

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<sup>4</sup> Pauline Croft, *King James* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 131; Otto J. Scott, *James I* (New York: Mason Charter, 1976), 249-251. While *The True Law* was published anonymously, James had it published by the king’s official printer and thus its authorship would likely be quite obvious. It was intended for a public audience, written in plain language, and persuasive in nature.

<sup>5</sup> Lori Anne Ferrell, *Government by Polemic* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 10.

<sup>6</sup> James I, “The Trew Law of Free Monarchies,” in *The Political Works of James I*, ed. Charles Howard McIlwain (New York: Russel & Russel Incorporated, 1965), 53.

<sup>7</sup> James I, “The Trew Law,” 54-57.

This argument possesses a number of interesting aspects. First, James continually refers throughout the text to his ideas concerning duty and allegiance. James sees duty within a commonwealth as a mutual owed allegiance by which the monarch must act to prevent the national calamities and miseries that come from disorder, and the people must be faithful in their allegiance to him. How does this faithfulness manifest? This is where James I's descriptions of a proper monarchy as "free and absolute" play a helpful explanatory role. For a monarch to be free and absolute, he must be allowed his power as God intended. A monarch must be allowed to lord over his people with an absolutism akin to that of a Father managing children, above any sort of law or curtailment of authority. He is to be obeyed by his subjects as if "God by his (own) mouth commanded him", for the king is the representative of God in the kingdom.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, to go against or question the sovereignty of a king was akin to rebelling against the order promulgated by God, or God Himself. Only when his subjects are true in their allegiance to the king, allowing him full discretion to rule free of impingement and absolute in power, can a king truly fulfill his duty.<sup>9</sup> This philosophy is the crux of the idea of the "Divine Right" of a king.

While much of *The True Law* considers the relationship between a king and his subjects, this begs an important question. Where does parliament fit in to all of this? If a king's authority is divinely ordained and absolute, and the duty of the people is to be faithful to his word, what role (if any) does a parliament play in governance. After all, both Scotland and England had well established parliaments with rich histories of their own.<sup>10</sup> In regards to parliament, James I did not change his theory of good governance one iota. In James I's view, parliaments were the novel inventions of past kings, and they existed to support the king's rule and will. Their power

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<sup>8</sup> James I, "The Trew Law," 57.

<sup>9</sup> James I, "The Trew Law," 55-58.

<sup>10</sup> Rosner and Theibault, *History of Europe*, 98.

only existed insofar as it served the king's pleasure, and any exercise of such power must occur through the person of the king. Parliaments were derivative bodies with the king as the root cause of their authority, which he could revoke at his pleasure.<sup>11</sup> James I countered any assertion that parliaments were constitutionally established, mandated, or empowered in *The True Law*, writing that "the kings were the authors and the makers of the (laws), and not the (laws) of the kings".<sup>12</sup>

This theory of constitutional order is perfectly understandable given James I's other theoretical positions. God bestows power on the king, who acts in His stead on Earth by promoting good governance and laws. The king promulgates laws on God's behalf, and it is from the king that all law and enforcement of the law ultimately stems. In this system, the law has no power or weight of its own except that which it derives from the king. Therefore, no temporal law can bind a king against his will. A parliament cannot derive any authority from the law without deriving it from the king, and therefore no aspect of governance can be outside the king's reach. Any system wherein parliament exercised a power independent of the king would be, in James I's own words, "(unlawful), and against the ordinance of God, ought to be alike odious to be thought, much (less) put in (practice)".<sup>13</sup> In one of history's many ironies, James would later compare suggestions of parliamentary autonomy to the idea that a body would overrule its head.<sup>14</sup> Given what ultimately became of Charles I's head, James may have been right.

James I's *The True Law of Free Monarchies* provides fascinating insight into his personal political theories. These theories would come to shape not only political thought amongst future

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<sup>11</sup> Conrad Russell, *Unrevolutionary England, 1603-1642* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1990), 4-5.

<sup>12</sup> James I, "The Trew Law," 62.

<sup>13</sup> James I, "The Trew Law," 62.

<sup>14</sup> Russell, *Unrevolutionary England*, 5.



Stuart kings, but English political history as well. He was upfront how he thought a kingdom ought to be ruled; by an absolute monarch given the deference befitting a representative of God on Earth. The king was the father of the household of his country, and from him stemmed the very idea of the nation itself. While theories of absolutism were not exclusive to English politics, the specific theories of and arguments for monarchical absolutism and the divine right of kings advanced by James I and highlighted by his *The True Law* would have serious repercussions for England in the coming century.<sup>15</sup>

### **III. Execution**

However, to propose and advocate for a theory of government is a very different thing than to actually put that theory into practice. It is likely far harder to concentrate all of the powers of government into the hands of a monarch than it is to simply discuss doing so. While *The True Law of Free Monarchies* certainly establishes James I's aspirations for his political order, it tells the readers very little about what sort of king he actually was. For that information, it is beneficial to turn to a speech given by king James I upon his arrival in England and his assumption of the English throne. James I's speech to the House of Lords on March 19<sup>th</sup> of 1603 provides key details as to how James planned to apply the theories explored in *The True Law*.

The first hint that James offered in his speech about what sort of king he considered himself comes in the last lines of his introduction. Describing his ascension as "...the blessings which God hath in my Person bestowed (upon) you all," and that the first of these blessings was

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<sup>15</sup> Rosner and Theibault, *History of Europe*, 124-125. Monarchical absolutism came to be so widely practiced in Europe, that the general theories advocates are too numerous to list. However, France under Louis XIV would see a very similar theory to James I's advanced and adopted (see Rosner and Theibault, 123-145).

peace in foreign policy "...which God hath (jointly) with my Person sent (unto) you."<sup>16</sup> In these sentences, and other similar ones, James is clearly conveying the same sentiment that he articulated in *The True Law*. He sees his role having been ordained unto him by God, his right to rule divine in nature and an instrument of God's will.

Further on in his speech, James continues to demonstrate to Parliament that he intends to apply his theories of government and rule as a monarch cloaked in divine right. Just as he did in *The True Law*, James moves from a religious justification for his being monarch to a description of the duties shared between a king and his subjects. Contrasting the reign of a just king with that of a tyrant, James states that "The righteous and (just) King (does acknowledge himself) to (be ordained) for the procuring of wealth and (prosperity) of his people..." before comparing his being ordained for his people as akin to a head being ordained for a body.<sup>17</sup> Throughout this concluding section of his speech, James makes clear to state that he believes that he has been divinely ordained for his people, rather than them having been destined for him. His continuing use of the word "ordain" conveys that James I saw his rule over England as part of God's plan. He, as monarch, is as much destined for rule by the Divine as he is by secular or worldly means. Thus, as his rule is an instrument of God, then he must be absolute in the same way that God is absolute over the world or (as James would say) the head is absolute over the human body.

When King James I made his speech to parliament in 1603, he must have appreciated the importance of one of his first addresses to his new domain. It was in this opening that he had the chance to set the tone for his rule, and he jumped at it. His speech laid clearly out the theological, theoretical, and political tenets by which he intended to rule, and an analysis of both *The True*

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<sup>16</sup> James I, "Speech of 1603," in *The Political Works of James I*, ed. Charles Howard McIlwain (New York: Russel & Russel Incorporated, 1965), 269-271.

<sup>17</sup> James I, "Speech of 1603," 278.

*Law* and his speech to parliament clearly indicate the direction in which James I wanted to take his reign. Despite any differences, England would be brought into compliance with James' royal prerogative like Scotland before it. While this early speech is informative as to how James I started off, it does not exactly convey how future events in James's reign would play out. Ruling England from 1603 to 1625, James had more than twenty years following this speech to parliament to put his words and thoughts into action.<sup>18</sup>

James I's reign on the thrones of England and Scotland encountered many of the same problems that other European monarchs faced during the Early Modern period; money, religion, and statecraft. Along with his inheritance of the throne of England, James I had inherited the problems that came with it. England was in a precarious diplomatic situation, as previous conflicts with the powerful Catholic Spanish that had almost toppled James' predecessor Elizabeth I spurred hawkish domestic calls for protracted conflict from English Protestants seeking solidarity with the rebel Dutch.<sup>19</sup> This of course was connected to the underlying religious climate of England, which had not yet resolved its sectarian differences. A patchwork of different religious policies by his predecessors ensured that James inherited a kingdom with a diversity of different religious practices in a time period where religious toleration was unheard of. The Anglican Church often varied wildly in its practices depending on what region one found themselves in, English Calvinists known as Puritans began demanding a cleaner break from Catholic practices, and a good number of Catholics or crypto-Catholics still existed in the lands

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<sup>18</sup> Rosner and Theibault, *History of Europe*, 96-98; Scott, *James I*, 263.

<sup>19</sup> Croft, *King James*, 52-53.

under James' control.<sup>20</sup> To top it all off, despite Elizabeth I's thriftiness, the Kingdom of England was one whole year's worth of royal revenue in debt.<sup>21</sup>

One of the most complicated issues James would face during his reign was that of England's relationship with Spain. Not simply an issue of statesmanship, the diplomatic relationship between England and Spain was frequently intermingled with religious and economic issues. England had developed strong ties with the Dutch since they had declared their independence, and there were many interested parties in England that saw a Spanish defeat as an opportunity for either spiritual or mercantile expansion. At the same time, there was a growing cacophony of protest from bruised English merchants complaining about Dutch trade practices and pushing for a war against the Netherlands.<sup>22</sup> Ultimately, and in keeping with his own advice that a king should govern for the common wealth and not the common will, James I embraced a third path forward.<sup>23</sup> Wary of burdening the treasury further and more keen on securing his own domestic foothold, James began to pursue peace talks with the Spanish monarchs almost immediately upon his accession to the throne. By 1604, James I and his ministers had signed a treaty with Spain that brought nearly twenty years of intermittent fighting to an end.<sup>24</sup> The treaty was a major achievement of diplomacy and enabled James to focus on domestic concerns rather than foreign entanglements for the shaky beginning of his reign. It ushered in an era of mercantile prosperity for the English, boosting trade between English merchants and their Dutch and Spanish counterparts without making any major concessions. James assured the Catholic

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<sup>20</sup> Rosner and Theibault, *History of Europe*, 96-99.

<sup>21</sup> Rosner and Theibault, *History of Europe*, 100.

<sup>22</sup> Scott, *James I*, 383-386.

<sup>23</sup> Scott, *James I*, 389.

<sup>24</sup> Croft, *King James*, 52-53.

Spanish that he had no intention of pursuing English Catholics and, despite not making any formal commitments, communicated through back channels that they would be tolerated.<sup>25</sup>

Yet, the specter of religion would not abandon James I's rule to tranquility so easily. By 1619, Europe found itself plunging headlong into the Thirty Years War with James' son-in-law, Frederick V of the Palatinate, firing some of the first shots against the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>26</sup> This time, James was unable to overcome the arguments made by war hawks in England and preparations for war began. With the royal treasury lacking the funds necessary to outfit an armed expedition to fight against the Catholics, James instead turned to public donations to try and muster some financial support for the Protestant cause. Despite the public pressure for English intervention, this fund amounted to little and forced James to play the last card in the deck. In 1621, James I called together a session of parliament for the purpose of raising the necessary funds.<sup>27</sup>

In early-17<sup>th</sup> Century England it was understood that, despite James' theories of monarchical absolutism, tradition ranging all the way back to King John I and the Magna Carta held that there were things that only Parliament had the power to do. Most importantly, Parliament was the only body capable of raising new taxes, especially those of such substance as was necessary to fund a war. When parliaments were called by monarchs for this purpose, they often took it as a cue to petition the king or queen for a redress of their grievances.<sup>28</sup> The royal government, for the most part, relied on certain areas of income reserved for it by tradition in order to fund itself. These areas included income from crown lands, the profits from the sales of

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<sup>25</sup> Helen Georgia Stafford, *James VI of Scotland and the Throne of England* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1940), 247.

<sup>26</sup> Scott, *James I*, 371.

<sup>27</sup> Croft, *King James*, 110.

<sup>28</sup> Scott, *James I*, 377.

royal or confiscated property, and excise taxes called ‘tonnage and poundage’ that had been given to every king for several hundreds of years by Parliament as a sort of coronation ceremony.<sup>29</sup> All together though, given the persistent royal pension for art collecting and gift giving and the stagnant incomes from these revenue sources, the Crown was wholly incapable of funding a war effort.

James I’s calling of the Parliament of 1621 gives modern historians a tremendous window into the character of King James and the lasting legacy that he would have on England. At the beginning of Parliament, despite his own frailty, James took it upon himself to give an hour-long speech about the prerogatives of a monarch. Cognizant of the fact that parliamentarians would likely seek to gain some influence over foreign policy in exchange for funding, James spoke at length about the nature of the House of Commons as an advisory group serving at his pleasure. James, in essence, boxed the members out of the issue of foreign policy entirely. James I was the king, it was his policy to set, and any questioning of that was a questioning of him.<sup>30</sup> In his opening address, James in every way put his principles of political theory into practice. However, while the speech did shut down any discussion amongst parliamentarians about coopting England’s foreign policy and Parliament did eventually grant money for the war, it did not prevent Parliament from pursuing other avenues of attack. Long unused parliamentary procedures of impeachment were dusted off and leveled at some of the King’s chief ministers whilst speakers came as close to attacking the king as they felt they

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<sup>29</sup> Croft, *King James*, 74. ‘Tonnage and poundage’ would prove a spark point for Charles I’s battles with Parliament in the years to come, as for the first time since the 1400’s Parliament refused to grant it in full.

<sup>30</sup> Scott, *James I*, 379.

could.<sup>31</sup> James, indignant at this obvious attack on royal prerogative, eventually would respond to the impeachments of his officials with coincidental arrests of the offending parties for “unrelated” crimes.<sup>32</sup>

James’ speech to Parliament in 1603 and the events surrounding the Parliament of 1621 highlight several key aspects of James I’s reign and legacy as King of England. Clearly, James sought to put into action the ideas that he formulated. He conveyed a seriousness about his principles in his words and actions, truly striving to implement his vision of proper royal government. Yet, however sincere his beliefs, his execution ran into several roadblocks. He encountered resistance from longstanding government traditions and a Parliament that believed in a significantly different vision of English government.<sup>33</sup> Yet, the influence of James I’s life and his political works was not constrained to his reign alone. Instead, he very deliberately inculcated his children with his own theories of government by writing a book specifically for them.

#### **Section IV. Legacy**

Originally written for the royal inner circle, James I’s *Basilikon Doron* was half political treatise, half instruction manual concerning the conduct of a good Christian king.<sup>34</sup> Translating to “Royal Gift” from Ancient Greek, the *Basilikon* would allow James to extend his philosophical reach from beyond the grave. Its influence on the Jacobean era can be seen immediately from the start of text, with James once again clearly articulating his philosophy of divine right and

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<sup>31</sup> Antonia Fraser, *King James VI of Scotland, I of England* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), 190-205.

<sup>32</sup> Scott, *James I*, 380-390.

<sup>33</sup> Rosner and Theibault, *History of Europe*, 96-100.

<sup>34</sup> Croft, *King James*, 131. Although the *Basilikon* would eventually find wide circulation, it was initially written specifically for James I’s son Henry and printed only seven times. After Henry’s death, James presented his son Charles (the future Charles I) with a copy.

bequeathing it to his heirs. James writes that his son should remember his double obligation to God, “first, for that he made you a man; and next, for that he made you a little (god) to sit on his Throne, and rule (over) other men.”<sup>35</sup> On the first half of that reminder, James explains that his son ought to hold himself in comparison to the examples set forth by the Bible and avoiding what James saw as the extremities of the Catholic Church and radical branches of Protestantism. Through this self-criticism, James asserts that his son will be able to uphold his first obligation to God and become the “natural father and kindly master...of his people;”, thereby ensuring his own sound personal judgment and the good governance of the state.<sup>36</sup> James sees good Christian behavior and piety as a necessary element of good character, and good character as one of the necessary aspects of good kingship.

Alongside character, the other necessary aspect of good kingship is the king’s willingness to establish justice and execute the laws of his kingdom according to his own judgment. A good king being divinely ordained, he should rely almost singularly on his good judgment and rarely consider other branches of government. He cautions his heir to “hold no Parliaments, but for (necessity) of new (laws), which would be but (seldom): for few (laws) and well put in execution, are best in a well ruled (commonwealth).”<sup>37</sup> While James does not explicitly rule out calling parliament to help in ruling the country, he clearly warns against it. Given that James used the *Basilikon* to instruct his children to consider their positions divinely ordained, to trust the soundness of their own independent judgment, and to spurn the council of parliament, the turbulence of Charles I’s reign should come as no shock.

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<sup>35</sup> James I, “Basilikon Doron,” in *The Political Works of James I*, ed. Charles Howard McIlwain (New York: Russel & Russel Incorporated, 1965), 12.

<sup>36</sup> James I, “Basilikon Doron,” 18.

<sup>37</sup> James I, “Basilikon Doron,” 20.



While an analysis of Charles I's tenure on the English throne is outside the bounds of this paper, it is impossible to understand James I's legacy as a leader without examining the rule of his heir. Charles not only wholeheartedly adopted many of the same political philosophies as his father, but his kingship would see those philosophies become the defining aspect of English politics. Where James I would sometimes clash with Parliament, Charles would engage in outright military action against it through two long civil wars. For evidence of James' influence on the ideological struggle that motivated the wars to come, one need look no further than his son's defense of himself whilst on trial following the second English Civil War. Proving himself captured but not subdued, Charles defended himself against charges of treason by tirelessly asserting the same theories of monarchical government that had been articulated to him by his father in the *Basilikon Doron*. He saw it just as his father would have. As king, he could not be convicted of treason for not only was it impossible to commit treason against himself, but the king represented the law itself and was above prosecution by it.<sup>38</sup>

Whereas *The True Law* can be seen as the ideas behind James I's reign and his speech to parliament in 1603 as the application of them, the *Basilikon Doron* can be seen as James I furthering of these ideas. While the former two texts clearly establish James as a keen political theorist with a distinct conviction about his station in the world, this latter work laid the groundwork for his lasting legacy. For proof of that legacy, one need look no further than the trials and tribulations of his son and heir Charles I. Charles believed in the same tenets and pursued the same goals as his father, his political creed having been fostered by James I's scholarly work on political theory. Not only did James influence Charles himself, but through

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<sup>38</sup> Rosner and Theibault, *History of Europe*, 105-110.

Charles he significantly influenced English political and constitutional history, which would in turn affect much of the world.

### **V. Conclusion**

Taken together, these three representatives of the political works of James I demonstrate a tremendous literary effort on behalf of the first Stuart king to develop and propagate his political ideas. When put into the proper context, a clear picture emerges of James I as he was: An impressively impactful king that left a lasting legacy on England and the world. Far from the first Stuart king or simply the first early modern king of England and Scotland, James I's life and legacy was profoundly important on the historical development of British politics and British political thought. Only through a thoughtful examination of both his bibliography and his reign can his politics be properly comprehended, the Stuart era rightly understood, and the true legacy of his life fully appreciated.

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