The Development of Platonic Studies in Britain and the Role of the Utilitarians

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The British utilitarians are not generally considered explorers of classical Greek thought. This paper examines the contribution of James Mill, John Stuart Mill, and George Grote to the development of Platonic studies in nineteenth-century Britain. Their understanding of Platonic philosophy challenged prevalent interpretations, and caused a fruitful debate over long neglected aspects of Plato's thought. Grote's Platonic analysis, which comes last in order of time, cannot, of course, be considered in isolation from the relevant debates in Germany. Grote, the erudite historian of ancient Greece, paid considerable attention to the arguments of the German classicists, put forward in many cases a new point of view, and prompted a radical revaluation of Platonic political thought.