

were this hypothesis to be accepted, however, the interpreter would still be at a loss to know the original context in which Jesus pronounced the parable, a matter which is always relevant in determining meaning—what if the parable of the Good Samaritan had been delivered to an exclusively Samaritan audience, for example? Something more should have been said about historical knowledge of the life of Jesus, and especially about Jesus' relationship to contemporary Judaism. The picture which can be pieced together from this book is based more on prejudice than research.

In the general remarks about the nature of parable (Chapter 1), it is shown that it serves the preacher well in distancing, provoking and appealing to an audience. The parable calls on everyday experience to express new points of view, not merely for contemplation but to stimulate action. This characteristic of the parables, however, creates difficulties, since the lives of ordinary people in the first century C.E. were different from ours. Why, then, should the modern preacher bother with Jesus' parables at all, since the experiences on which they draw are alien to us? Why should he not adopt the method without the content? Moreover, this is not just a matter of cultural and material changes but of theological developments. The theological questions addressed by the Gospel parables, appropriate for the preaching of the early Church, are no longer those of a society which can draw on nearly 2000 years of Christian history and learning, and which must meet different kinds of cogent and articulate opposition. The overriding presupposition of the book, therefore, is that the interpretation of Scripture is centrally important for preaching.

MARGARET DAVIES

**ORACLES OF GOD** by John Barton, *Darton, Longman and Todd, 1986,*  
pp xii + 323, £12.95.

From time to time there comes a book which makes us say to ourselves, if not to others, 'I wish I'd written that'. This is exactly such a book as far as this reviewer is concerned. Some years ago I had a rather vague notion that it would be a good idea to write an Introduction to the Old Testament starting from the text as we have it and working back to the sources and separate pericopae that now make up its books. I soon realised that I had neither the time nor, more importantly, the competence for such a task. John Barton has shown that he has the competence and he has found the time to make a start with the prophets. He has written this splendid book as a first stage, contenting himself with an examination of the way prophecy was perceived by people living in the last two or three centuries BC and the first one or two AD. The arguments he uses are so close and complex that one begins the book with some apprehension. Yet there is no need to fear. He provides sufficient signposts along the way both to point us forward and to remind us where we have been and so there is little danger of getting lost and we are able to follow him all the way. Moreover the style is clear and attractive and this makes the book a joy to read.

It is essential to decide what was understood by the words 'prophet' and 'prophecy' in the period and so the first third of the book is taken up with a discussion of questions relating to the canon of scripture and the place of the Prophets within it. In true detective writer style he lines up various theories regarding the formation of the Canon, the choice of books and the different orders in which they are found. Just when we have reached the point where we think we can safely identify the 'criminal' he opens up new questions and leads us on to quite a different conclusion, namely that the three-fold division into Law, Prophets and Writings with which we are now familiar was not in force during the period under consideration and that when the term 'prophets' is used it included many of what we now call the Writings as well as other books not now in our Canon. Indeed 'canon' can be used in this period only if it means books regarded as having some authority, but not if it

refers to a closed collection from which all others have been excluded. The perception of 'prophet', then, is very much wider than that which has been gained through modern critical study.

This point established, he goes on to identify four modes of reading these books, looking at Jewish sources, Josephus, Philo, Deutero-canonical books, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran literature and, of course, the New Testament. The range of material used is impressive. He devotes the next chapters to four 'modes of perception', declining to give names to them since this may only mislead. They may be described roughly as the reading of the Prophets (i) to discern ethical norms by which to live life, (ii) to gain information about the present from their predictions about the future which is now often regarded as at hand, (iii) to discover the divine plan in history without necessarily any idea that its end is near and (iv) to understand more fully the nature of God, especially as just, and the mysteries of the divine realm he inhabits. To write a summary such as this is to realise the inadequacy of any summary.

In all this the question is raised of apocalyptic and its relation to prophecy. In the end, though he will allow the use of 'apocalypse' to describe the genre, he refuses to use the word 'apocalypticist' or 'apocalyptic movement' for he finds no evidence that such a distinct group of people ever existed. The view that they were the successors of the prophets when prophecy came to an end after Ezra is seriously challenged though the changes in outlook that took place at that time are fully recognised.

In the preface there is a hint that he will continue the journey backwards through time into the pre-exilic period. Let us hope this hint soon becomes a reality.

HARRY MOWVLEY

**THE PHILOSOPHY OF RIGHT AND WRONG** by Bernard Mayo. *Routledge and Kegan Paul*. 1966. Pp. 176.

How better to characterize this expertly crafted book than to say that it could almost be regarded as a singularly competent and illuminating travel guide through the several complex and intricate *Sehenswürdigkeiten* of contemporary ethics and ethical theory? Not that it is any mere compilation of the relevant historical facts and details of developments in ethics in the present century. It is no mere Baedeker. Rather what Professor Mayo does is to provide his readers with a most insightful and incisive sorting out of the several issues, as well as the relevant arguments pro and con, that are all to be found in the thickets of present-day moral-philosophical discussion, meta-ethics as compared with ethics; freedom vs. determinism; naturalism vs. non-naturalism; prescriptivism as over against descriptivism; law as compared with morals; ethics of aspiration or of goals, as contrasted with ethics of duty and obligation. Moreover, so far from proceeding in the manner of any mere survey, Professor Mayo proceeds, as it were, dialectically, so as to progress toward the establishment of what he takes to be the right position in ethics, viz., that of Prescriptivism.

For the purposes of this review, therefore, I propose to try to trace out the main steps in what it seems to me this dialectic of Professor Mayo's amounts to, showing how it does manage to achieve the end which Professor Mayo wishes to achieve, but also how that same dialectic can be carried right on toward a further undermining of that very Prescriptivism which Professor Mayo has been so anxious to establish. Let me, accordingly, try to point up my review in terms of three main questions, each of which Professor Mayo considers successively in his book.

First question: What is it that distinguishes the moral from the non-moral? For as Professor Mayo avers, 'the central question of meta-ethics is simply to find what distinguishes the moral from the non-moral.' And this first question Professor Mayo would