nothing can put things in perspective like this slim volume. The scripture loses its relevance and becomes meaningless if it is not practised. Kierkegaard emphasis the praxis of scripture: ‘The most important thing for the gospel is not to reprimand and scold; what is most important for the gospel is to get human beings to follow its guidance’ (38). This book inspires one to take the first step towards practising the guidelines and also to know more about Kierkegaard and what he has to say.

Why Philosophize?
Jean-François Lyotard
Translated by Andrew Brown

Philosophy is seen as a dry business. It is often considered to be the pastime of overread zealots, who are desperate to have some fixated world view. In the same vein, many have stereotyped Jean-François Lyotard to be just a postmodern thinker. Lyotard was definitely one, no arguing that, but he was more importantly a great philosopher. This book that raises a pertinent question, a book that questions the very need for philosophy, is a timely addition to the library of all philosophers and philosophy students. Lyotard substitutes the almost cliché question, ‘What is philosophy?’ with the more far-reaching question, ‘Why philosophise?’ He does this because he is concerned that ‘philosophy misses itself’ (17). This book is a translation of a typed text preserved at the Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris. The text is the transcript of a series of lectures Lyotard gave to the students of Sorbonne University, Paris and the French original was first published only in 2012. Of the many merits of Andrew Brown’s translation, striking is his giving the French original of words that cannot be properly translated into English. Lyotard situates the need for philosophy in the more basic need for desire. He asks the important question: ‘Why desire?’

Lyotard contends that philosophy has gone out of the space of philosophy and has lost its form because the need for philosophy comes from the need to be, the need to exist.

While analysing the need for desire, Lyotard clarifies the contribution of Freud: ‘If … Freud’s work has had and continues to have the impact that you are aware of, this is definitely not because he put sexuality everywhere … rather, because Freud embarked on forging a link between sexual life and emotional life, social life, and religious life, and brought sexual life out of its ghetto’ (27). Lyotard intends to give a Freud insight to the need for philosophising: ‘What the philosopher desires is not that different desires be convinced and conquered, but that they be inflected and reflected’ (37). Philosophising, according to Lyotard, is a basic desire, and to question this desire is absurd. To him ‘to philosophize is not to desire wisdom, it is to desire desire’ (38). To philosophise is to bring order and bring out philosophy that has become concealed, and lost unity.

Lyotard continues in this strain and positions speech as following thought and says ‘we need to realize that to think is already to speak’ (73). Lyotard emphasises the need for action but cautions: ‘If the world needs to be transformed, this is because it is already transformed. There is in the present something that announces, anticipates and beckons the future’ (112). Just as thought is integral to speech, it is integral to action: ‘Transformative action cannot manage without a “theory” in the true sense of the world (sic), in other words a speech that risks saying’ (113). Lyotard gives a wonderful summary of the need for philosophising: ‘So this is why we philosophize: because there is desire, because there is absence in presence, deadness in life … and finally because we cannot evade this: testifying to the presence of the lack with our speech’ (123). Lyotard ends his book by asking how is it possible to be without philosophy. That is the correct question to ask: how is it possible to be without thinking? This book is a welcome addition to the philosophy corpus and enlightens us on Lyotard’s early thoughts.