In discussing the field of critical leadership theory in the opening chapter of *The Dark Side of Transformational Leadership: A Critical Perspective*, author Dennis Tourish notes that many scholars seem to suggest no alternative to the idea that "oppressive power relations are inscribed on all human interaction, meaning that leader–follower relations remain inescapably tortured, conflicted, alienated, and incapable of resolution" (p. 14). Tourish goes on to indicate that the objective of the present work is to present a more constructive response by not only asking critical questions, but also attempting to offer alternatives.

The text is organized into three parts. Six opening chapters present a critical analysis of leadership theory, and the following section develops that critique in four chapter-long case studies. Tourish concludes with a chapter adding additional analysis as well as a proposed alternative. Each chapter ends with a set of discussion questions that encourage the reader to reflect on the ideas and consider one's personal perspective.

Tourish’s critique is centered on the concept of agency, asserting that the dynamics of power, influence, and conformity result in little opportunity for followers to pursue their own goals and vision. He indicates that transformational leadership emphasizes changing the goals of followers in such a way that disempowers their free will. The analysis suggests that changing goals and disempowerment work primarily in the interest of the leaders and to the detriment of followers.

Within leadership theory, transformational leadership is typically discussed in relation to transactional leadership, which is characterized by a focus on exchanges between leaders and followers. Transformational leadership, however, moves beyond simple exchange to focus on connection, increased motivation, and a heightened sense of morality for both parties. The motivation and morality components are frequently operationalized in terms of four factors: (a) idealized influence or charisma, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual
stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration (Northouse, 2010). Tourish’s critique focuses upon the factors of charisma, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation.

The critique joins a number of others considering the ethics of transformational leadership. Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) asserted that these critiques portray transformational leadership in a manner that is not consistent with the spirit of the theory. The distinction between the spirit of the original theory and its dark potential has inspired the introduction of a separate construct referred to as pseudo-transformational leadership.

It is questionable, however, whether the dark perspective that Tourish presents is unique to transformational leadership. Tourish focuses upon the implications of influence, a concept that is central to the definition of leadership in general. Indeed, leadership is frequently defined in terms of an individual’s ability to influence others (Northouse, 2010). In addition, a number of leadership theories suggest similar processes of influence (Hernandez, Eberly, Avolio, & Johnson, 2011).

The contexts in which Tourish applies his critique of influence also lead to the question of whether the text is best situated within critical leadership studies, within the philosophy of economics, or within critical management theory. The volume of content focused upon business and industry is disproportionate to that considering nonbusiness contexts. Of the six chapters in the first part of the book, where the author presents his initial analysis, four are focused upon issues related to management and industry. The four case studies in the second part of the book include an analysis of Enron and of the banking industry.

The lack of a precise focus on transformational leadership may partially be a function of the process in which the book appears to have been compiled. The majority of the chapters include a footnote indicating that the material was originally published as part of a journal article. Bringing together the ideas from those publications leads to an important analysis of power and influence, but in a manner that is somewhat fragmented.

Issues of theoretical purity and semantics aside, Tourish presents a number of important considerations. It could be inferred that the intent in compiling scholarly publications was to present those considerations to a wider audience. The discussion questions at the end of the chapters further suggest that the author was focused on the meaningful application of ideas rather than pedantic scholarship.

Current and aspiring managers may find that the ideas influence the ways in which they establish and communicate goals. Two of the case studies also end with a discussion of implications for leadership, suggesting that the text is focused on emerging or developing leaders. Faculty in organizational behavior, industrial–organizational psychology, organizational communication, and higher education leadership may find the text fuels engaging conversations in graduate-level seminars.

Each of the considerations noted above would make The Dark Side of Transformational Leadership a strong addition to a course of study in leadership and management, especially if combined with readings related to followership and to destructive leadership. Popular discussions of leadership often seem to represent two diametrically opposed perspectives in either holding leaders as beyond reproach or vilifying their behaviors. Human behavior is rarely as simple as these perspectives suggest, and Tourish’s critique offers an important perspective in considering the implications of the various roles that everyone holds in the complex dynamics of organizational life.
