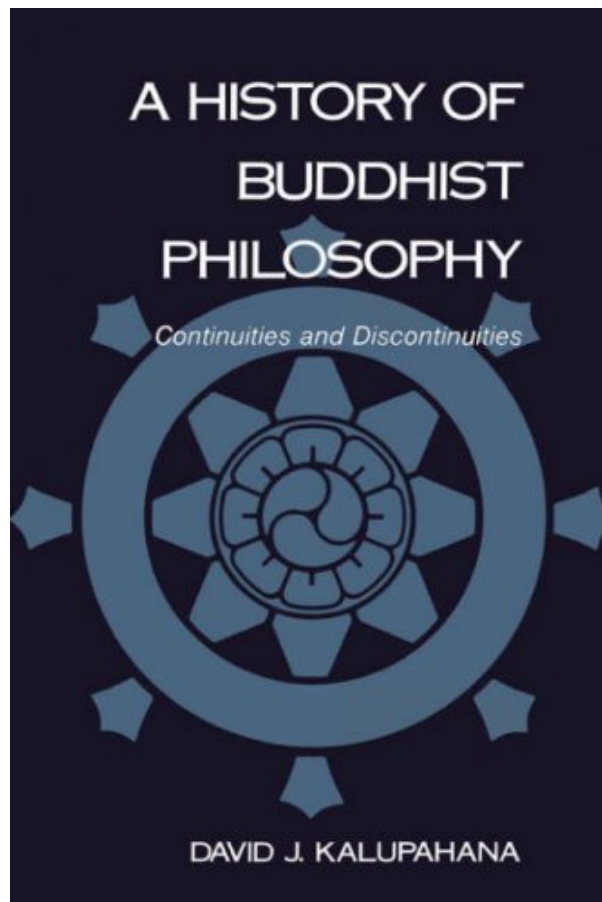
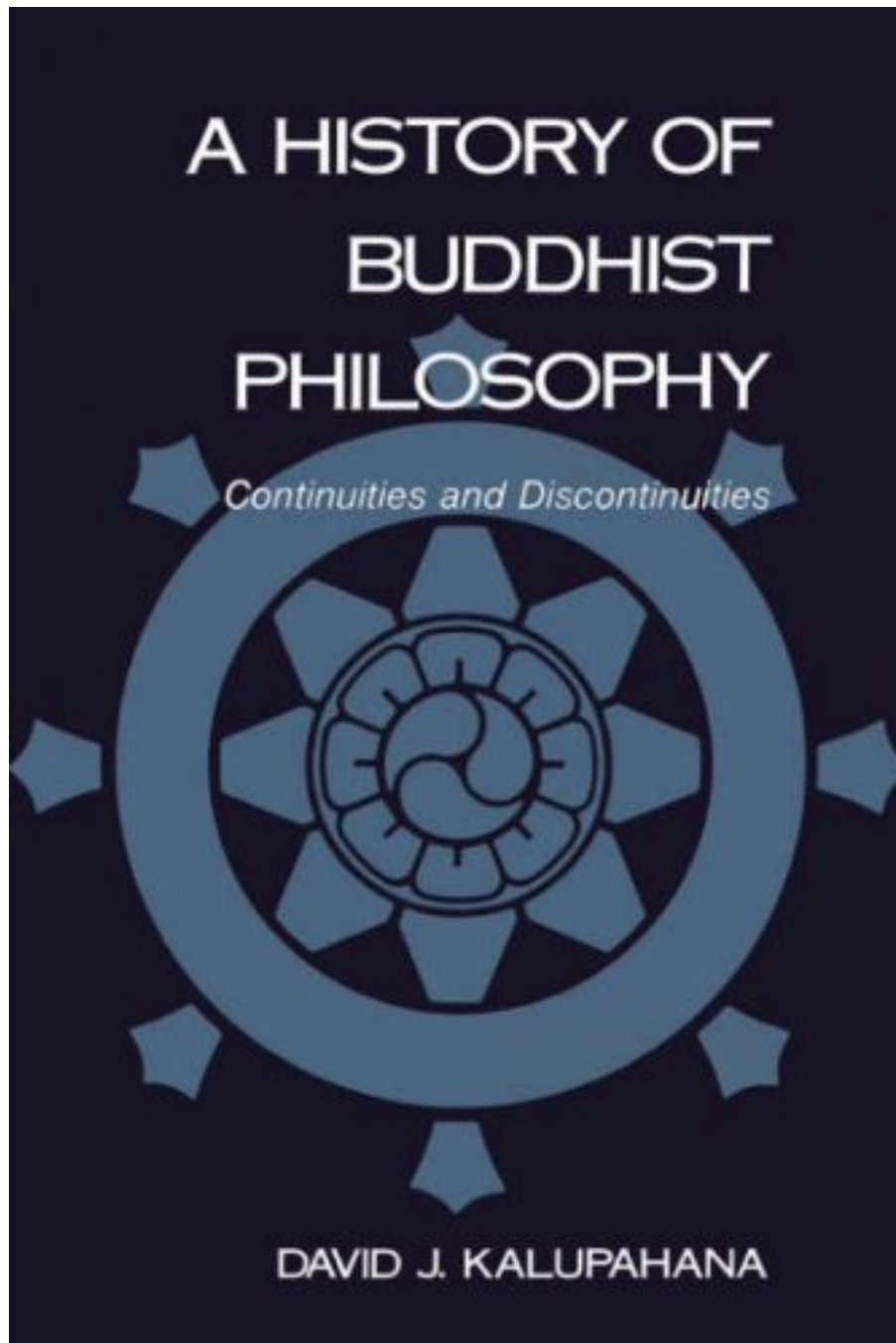


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David J. Kalupahana's *Buddhist Philosophy: A Historical Analysis* has, since its original publication in 1976, offered an unequalled introduction to the philosophical principles and historical development of Buddhism. Now, representing the culmination of Dr. Kalupahana's thirty years of scholarly research and reflection, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy* builds upon and surpasses that earlier work, providing a completely reconstructed, detailed analysis of both early and later Buddhism.

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An enlightening work,

By JamboBwana

David Kalupahana's *History of Buddhist Philosophy* has taken on new and deepening perspectives for me over the past six years since I first purchased the book. Kalupahana covers the development of Buddhist Philosophy from its early days of oral tradition, Councils and Schisms through to the Vajrayana's Tantra and, lastly, on silent meditation and Ch'an. Included is a fascinating appendix on the role that the Lankavatara Sutta may have played in early efforts to establish a Mahayana school in Sri Lanka. I have had experience in the Vajrayana (Tantric Empowerments), Zen and Insight Meditation (Vipassana), and maybe that's why Kalupahana's book rings true to me. It is a shame that his more recent writings are not readily available in the U.S..

44 of 57 people found the following review helpful.

Unreliable

By Xinxing Changzhen

As someone who does have an academic background in Buddhist studies, I want to warn people looking for a good introduction to Buddhist thought that this is not it. The book starts off by setting up its view of "what the Buddha taught" and then proceeds with the highly normative project of sorting later developments into those that are "true to the Buddha's thought" and those that aren't. My own work has been mostly on East Asian Buddhism, so when I read the chapters on early Buddhism, I was left with an uneasy feeling that his

analysis was off-base but I didn't have the background to refute. Nevertheless, the uncritical use of Western philosophical terms to analyze the thought of the historical Buddha (not to mention the uncritical acceptance of the idea that the Pali scriptures record the words of the Buddha) is grounds for unease and suspicion by any standard. When I got to the later chapter dealing with the Mahayana and East Asia, I found some confirmation of my suspicion. Although he obviously has great expertise in the Pali tradition, he equally obviously overreaches in his attempt to discuss some parts of the later tradition. For instance, the chapter on the Lankavatara is based entirely on a single work (Suzuki's) and the those on Chan and Tantra have many factual errors and interpretations that mangle the material to fit his argument. There were so many problems with the sections that I did have the background to appraise that I would not want to rely on the accuracy of the first part at all. In all, this book is a prime example of the necessity of reading critically.

For those who want a good introduction to what early Buddhist thinkers meant in their own terms I would recommend Paul Williams' *Buddhist Thought*. It's clearer and more sound. Since it summarizes the most recent research in this area, but aims to be an undergrad text, it is both informative for the Buddhist scholar and accessible to a newcomer.

12 of 15 people found the following review helpful.

A Difficult, Ultimately Unsatisfying Read

By umze

My purpose in reading this book was to harmonize my somewhat limited knowledge of Western philosophy with my somewhat limited knowledge of Buddhist philosophy. I must say that I gained tremendously in my knowledge of both areas. However, the path was arduous, and Kalupahana was a difficult companion.

Kalupahana's goal was somewhat different than my own, and I'll judge him on that goal first. Kalupahana seeks to analyze the "original" teachings of Gotama, sort through later thinkers, and pronounce them as being in the true spirit of Gotama's teachings or not. This task, I fear, is impossible - the records are too unreliable. Kalupahana does come up with some fascinating and scholarly work. I don't have the expertise to judge; however, I am not convinced that Gotama was not a complete nihilist, or very close to one. Later thinkers introducing "absolutism" into his system would not be perverters of his philosophy, but rather saviors. It seems to me that Nagarjuna was the first true clear advocate of the middle path, and Kalupahana (and some other authors I have read) wants to imbue Gotama with Nagarjuna's insights.

The book contains fascinating insights into concepts of logic, perception, and language. Sometimes that discussion does not reach a satisfactory conclusion: for example, Kalupahana provides some tantalizing ideas about adopting non-binary logic systems, but doesn't really explain how such a system works in practice. He also spends some time condemning the sectarian rift between the Mahayana and Theravada schools, but doesn't (to my mind) harmonize them or fully acknowledge that they are, in fact, different.

The writing is dense, and hard to follow. Part of this is the subject matter; however, some is Kalupahana's unclarity. I have had an easier time reading detailed descriptions of Kant, which is much more dense material than tackled here. Although Western concepts are sprinkled about, they are not integrated. For example, if I were to answer the question of whether the Buddha was, in Kalupahana's opinion, a nominalist or a realist, I would have to give a koan-like response.

A thought-provoking, rich book, but a lot of work.

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