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A comparative approach to the theistic proofs of Anselm of Canterbury's 'Monologion'

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The four theistic proofs of *Monologion* are based on the categories of being *per se* and being *per aliud*. This article analyses them through a comparative approach. The categories of *per se* and *per aliud* are compared with the categories of substance (*ti*) and function (*yong*) as touched on the first chapter of the Rectifying Ignorance (正蒙 Zhengmeng) of Zhang Zai (1020–1077), an exponent of neo-Confucianism. In fact, the two pairs of categories explain the relationship between an absolute, the supreme nature (summum) or the Great Void (太虚 taixu) and the sensible world. Through the comparison, this article highlights the fundamental function of being *per aliud* in the rational knowledge of the supreme nature that exists *per se* and provides new insights into the process of derivation of being *per aliud* from the being *per se*.

Contribution: This article, through the comparison with the Chinese philosophical tradition, intends to offer a new perspective on the understanding of the Anselmian categories of being *per se* and being *per aliud*.

Keywords: Anselm; Zhang Zai; *per se*; *per aliud*; substance-function (*ti-yong*); comparative philosophy; reciprocal illumination.

Introduction

In the past 30 years, comparative studies between Western philosophy and Chinese thought have been approached in three different ways. Firstly, many works have sought to give an answer to the so-called 'Needham Problem', that is to explain why the Chinese scientific tradition, in spite of its remarkable technological achievements, did not give birth to modern science. This question has been studied, by Lloyd and Sivin (2008) and Guo (2017), among others. A second type of approach aims at comparing two philosophical traditions in order to define transcultural categories and lay the foundations for a world philosophy. This approach was adopted by Mou (2007) and more recently by Ma and Brakel (2016). Finally, comparison between two different traditions can be used as an exegetical tool for the study of philosophical texts. The comparative approach may, in fact, highlight some aspects of categories or ideas that within a single tradition would otherwise remain in the background and neglected. This kind of approach is used in the studies of Jullien (2014) and Sharma (2005).

This article retains the third approach and relies on the concept of 'Reciprocal Illumination' theorised by Sharma. His theory holds that one can make two types of comparisons, either between homonyms or between synonyms:

> Homonymous comparisons are between phenomena, which appear similar but are really different, just as homonyms are words with similar sounds but with different meanings. Synonymous comparisons are between phenomena that appear different but possess similar significance in each tradition, just as synonyms are words that have different sounds but are similar in meaning. (Sharma 2005:25)

'Reciprocal illumination' emerges within the synonymous comparisons, because in these, 'one tradition sheds light on the other' (Sharma 2005:25). This is a 'one-to-one comparison' (Sharma 2005:64–65), because its focus is not to reconstruct the historical development that within each tradition led to the definition of the two compared phenomena or ideas, but it is to deepen the understanding of the *comparanda* itself.

Sharma theorised the concept of reciprocal illumination in the context of a comparison between two religious experiences and not in the context of a comparison between theological or philosophical theories which reflect those experiences. Nevertheless, this method also maintains its validity in comparative philosophy, if the object of comparison is limited to the

understanding of synonymous categories used by two philosophers of different traditions. As also pointed out by Jullien (2014), the gap (*écart*) of meaning that exists between ideas or categories of two different traditions is fundamental for the understanding of those categories or concepts themselves.

The aim of this article is to analyse Anselmian categories of *per se* and *per aliud* through a comparison with the categories of 'substance' (*ti* 体) and 'function' (*yong* 用) of Zhang Zai (1020–1077), an exponent of neo-Confucianism. This comparison is based on the assumption that the two pairs of categories are 'synonymous'. In fact, both philosophers use those categories in order to explain, on the one hand, the relation between the sensible world and its transcendental origin and, on the other hand, to demonstrate the necessity of the dependence of multiplicity on unity.

This article consists of three sections. The first two sections briefly describe the meaning of the two pairs of categories that are compared in the concluding section. The first section is dedicated to Anselm and analyses the uses and meaning of the categories of *per se* and *per aliud* in the first four chapters of the *Monologion*.[1] The second part contains a description of the categories of *ti* and *yong* as touched on the first chapter of Zhang Zai's *Rectifying Ignorance* (正蒙 *Zhengmeng*).[2]

The categories of being *per se* and being *per aliud* in *Monologion* I–IV

The first four chapters of *Monologion* reveal four proofs of the existence of a supreme nature (*summum*), which Anselm only in the last chapter explicitly identifies as God. The aim of this argumentation is to clarify the meaning of the concept of *summum* as used by Augustine in the *De Trinitate* (Gilbert 1984:201). The first of the four arguments is, in fact, an expansion of the argument contained in *De Trinitate* VII.3 (Brower 2019:6).

The four proofs converge in demonstrating that the existence of a supreme nature is necessary, which exists through itself, *per se*, and explains the multiplicity of the reality. All other things stem from this Being *per se* and depend on it. Therefore, they exist only by virtue of another; that is, they are *per aliud*. Thus, Anselm's whole argumentation is based on the idea that the condition of the existence of a multiplicity of things that is not contradictory is the existence of a unity that is its cause (Sciuto 2002:17). In brief, this is the content of the four proofs:

1. As there is a great variety of goods of any kind, it is necessary that there exists an essence of good through

itself (*per se*) and through which all other goods are good (*Mon.* 1).
2. Supremely good essence is also supremely great, and all great things are great through him (*Mon.* 2).
3. As everything exists through something, and it is not possible that all existing things exist through various essences, therefore there is only one essence through which everything exists, and this essence exists through itself (*Mon.* 3).
4. As all things are not of equal dignity but among them there is a hierarchy, therefore there is a thing better than all others. This is the supreme nature that exists through itself and is good and great through itself (*Mon.* 4).

At first glance, the four proofs seem to be a simple repetition in different forms of the Platonic argument of participation.[3] Their structure can be summarised as follows: as there are things of different kinds that possess a certain characteristic, it is necessary that there is an entity through which all these different things share that characteristic. However, Anselm's aim is not to demonstrate the existence of four Platonic ideas but to demonstrate that the qualities of goodness, greatness, existence and dignity are different aspects of a supreme nature. Thus, the four arguments are constituents of a broader and more complex argumentation.

Their structure is suggested by the title of chapters two and four, both entitled 'On the same thing'. On that basis, one may divide the four proofs into two parts (Gilbert 1984:204). In the first part, in *Mon.* 1, Anselm first proves the existence of a goodness *per se*, and then introduces the concept of hierarchy and gradation of goods, stating that 'no good that exists through another (*per aliud*) is equal to or greater than that good who is good through himself (*per se*)' (*Mon.* 1, 15, 7–8).[4] Thus, goodness *per se* is also supremely good and supremely great (*Mon.* 1, 15, 9–11). Here greatness stands for moral greatness and is to be understood in the sense that 'the greater something is, the better or worthier it is, as wisdom is great' (*Mon.* 2, 15, 20).[5] This means that greatness is inconceivable without goodness and its gradation, because it points to the degree to which an object participates in goodness. Clearly, if goodness *per se* is good to the highest degree, therefore it is also great to the highest degree.

The structure of the second part is similar to the first one. After demonstrating that everything exists by virtue of a single being *per se*, Anselm points out that the condition of being *per aliud* entails a gradation and a hierarchy because 'whatever exists through another is less than the one through whom all other things exist and who alone exists through himself' (*Mon.* 3, 16, 20–21).[6] Hence, the fourth and final argument: not all existing things exist in the same way;

1. References to *Monologion* (*Mon.*) are given by chapter, followed, when necessary, by page and line number of the edition in Schmitt (ed. 1946). All the English translations of *Monologion* are taken from (Williams 2007).

2. References to *Rectifying Ignorance* are given by chapter, page and line number of the edition in Zhang (ed. 1978). There is no integral English translation of *Rectifying Ignorance* but its some excerpts are translated in (Chan 1963); unless otherwise indicated, all the English translations are my own.

3. This argument first appears in *Parmenides* 132 a-b and Anselm keeps its original structure (Adams 1972:10–13).

4. *Nullum bonum, quod per aliud est, aequale aut maius est eo bono, quod per se est bonum.*

5. *Quanto maius tanto melius est aut dignius, ut est sapientia.*

6. *Quidquid est per aliud, minus est quam illud per quod cuncta sunt alia, et quod solum est per se.*

likewise, all existing things possess different dignity. If there is a hierarchy of being, then there must be a nature at the top of that hierarchy. This 'supreme among all existing things' (*Mon.* 4, 18, 3)[7] is good and being *per se*.

The two parts of argumentation form a parallel structure, because the first proofs of each part describe absolute qualities of the supreme nature, that is, goodness and being, while the second proofs describe its relative qualities, that is, greatness and dignity. Goodness and being are absolute because they show the true essence of supreme nature *per se*. Greatness and dignity, on the other hand, are relative because they entail a hierarchy and emerge only within a relation between the supreme nature and what exists by his virtue. In this regard, a few chapters below, Anselm observes that:

> If none of those things [*i.e. things that are* per aliud] in relation to which he [*i.e. the supreme nature*] is said to be supreme or greater had ever existed, he would not be understood as supreme or greater; but he would not on that account be any less good, and his essential greatness would in no way be diminished.[8] (*Mon.* 15, 28, 13–16)

In this argumentation, two elements are particularly worth looking at. The first is that the principle of participation, through which Anselm explains the relationship between being *per se* and being *per aliud*, entails a gradation and a hierarchy of being. The being *per se* is not only at the top of this hierarchy, but it is also the standard on which the hierarchy itself is predicated. Thus, the categories of *per se* and *per aliud* seem to imply a 'realism of standards' (Brower 2019:19). This means that being *per aliud* participates of the being *per se* by means of a resemblance. Therefore, the more similar a thing is to the being *per se*, the better, the greater and the more worthy that thing is. In this kind of participation, the being *per se* is present in everything that is *per aliud*, as a unique source of existence, but at the same time his true essence transcends all the things that are *per aliud*.

The second important element of this argumentation is that the different qualities of being *per se* only emerge from the relationship with being *per aliud*. Unsurprisingly, the relative qualities of greatness and dignity require a plurality of things of a different quality to be conceived. However, goodness and being also seem to be rationally conceivable only on the basis of what is good and what is *per aliud*. In fact, according to *Mon.* 17, the supreme nature is simple, without part, and all his qualities are identical to one another (Morreall 1982:45). Therefore, goodness can be distinguished from being only if perceived in a being *per aliud*.

Great Void is substance (*ti*) and *qi* is function (*yong*)

Zhang Zai's philosophy originated in reaction to Buddhist and Daoist philosophy. In particular, Buddhism held that the

sensible world was an illusion, which is tantamount to breaking the connection between man and Heaven, that is, nature. Before the advent of Buddhism, the union between man and Heaven was considered a self-evident truth on whose relationship the ethics of classical Confucianism relied. Thus, the challenge that Buddhism posed to neo-Confucian philosophers was to elaborate a new metaphysical foundation to the union between man and Heaven, in order to restore Confucian ethics (Cheng 1997:475–476). Zhang Zai's response to this challenge is the theory of *qi* (vital energy),[9] which is set out in his main work, *Rectifying Ignorance* (*Zhengmeng*).

According to Zhang Zai, *qi* is 'the fundamental substance by which all processes of the universe can be explained' (Huang 1968:248). This suggests that everything that exists is a form of *qi*. *Qi* possesses two contrary forces or polarities within it: *yin* and *yang*. The opposition of the two forces causes a constant movement and change of form through a process of condensation and dispersion. The *yin* force causes the *qi* to condense until it becomes sensible and assumes a material form; on the contrary, the *yang* force makes the condensed *qi* disperse and causes the destruction of material forms. Zhang Zai explains this process through a simile with water (*Zhengmeng* 1, 8, 14). Just as water freezes into ice and assumes a definite form, when the ice melts that form disappears; thus, *qi* condenses into material forms and when it disperses, the actual forms vanish.

There are three states of *qi*. The original state is without material form (*wu xing* 无形) or ideal form (*wu xiang* 无象).[10] This state is called Great Void (*taixu* 太虚), and it is not only imperceptible but also ineffable, because in this state the two forces of *yin* and *yang* are united and indistinguishable. In its intermediate state *qi* possesses an ideal form but not a material form perceptible to the senses. The forces of *yin* and *yang* belong to this state of *qi*. Finally, when *qi* takes a material form, it becomes perceptible to the senses. These three states of *qi* possess a hierarchy, as the Great Void causes the movement of *yin* and *yang*, and these two forces govern the cycle of life and death of material forms. As everything that exists is a transitory form of a single substance, each form is intimately connected with the others and with the Great Void, which is the ultimate cause of the universe.

In Zhang Zai's thought, the relationship between *qi* with form, be it ideal or material, and *qi* without any form, corresponds to the relationship between the metaphysical and the physical level. In the first chapter of *Rectifying Ignorance*, this is expressed by way of the relation between

the Great Void and the *qi*, which here is not a reference to the 'universal substance', but a mere indication of the *qi* with a form.[11] In Zhang Zai's argumentation, Great Void and *qi* correspond, respectively, to not-being (*wu* 无) and being (*you* 有). On their relation, he observed:

> If it is argued that material force [*qi*] is produced from the Void, then because the two are completely different, the Void being infinite while material force is finite, the relationship between substance [*ti*] and function [*yong*] is broken, such an argument would fall into the naturalism of Loazi who claimed that being comes from non-being and failed to understand the eternal principle of the undifferentiated unity of being and non-being. If it is argued that all phenomena are but things perceived in the Great Void, then since things and the Void would not be mutually conditioned, since the physical form and the nature of things would be self-contained, and since these, as well as Heaven and man, would not be interdependent, such an argument would fall into the doctrine of the Buddha who taught that mountains, rivers, and the total stretch of land are all subjective illusions. This principle of unity is not understood because ignorant people know superficially that the substance [*ti*] of the nature of things is the Void, the Emptiness, but do not know that the Way of Heaven is his function [*yong*]. (*Zhengmeng* 1, 8, 2–5)[12]

In the light of this interpretation, the relationship between the Great Void and *qi* is a one of substance (*ti*) and function (*yong*). The fundamental mistake of both Buddhists and Daoists consists in their failure to grasp the relationship between being and not being, Great Void and *qi*.

The substance–function relationship is based on the principle that every plurality is derived from a dualism, and every dualism originates in a unity. The function is always composed at least of two elements that define and delimit each other and stand in opposition to each other. The substance is the union of contraries, which is undifferentiated and ineffable. If it were knowable, in fact, it would possess an ideal form and would be a function. Thus, from the Great Void emerge *yin* and *yang*, which are its two main functions. Their dynamic relationship is the Way of Heaven (*tiandao* 天道), whereof all existing things are generated.

As the Great Void is the substance and *qi* is its function, then Zhang Zai concludes that 'the Great Void is *qi* and they are in perfect harmony' (*Zhengmeng* 1, 8, 14).[13] Thus, from an ontological point of view, the Great Void and *qi* are two

11.Although *qi* is the fundamental concept of his philosophy, Zhang Zai does not always use it with the same meaning. Kasoff (1984:66) distinguished three meanings that the term *qi* can take depending on context: (1) 'universal substance', (2) 'condensed matter that forms sensible objects', (3) the two meanings simultaneously.

12.知虚空即气，则有无、隐显、神化、性命通一无二，顾聚散、出入、形不形，能推本所从来，则深于易者也。若谓虚能生气，则虚无穷，气有限，体用殊绝，入老氏" 有生于无" 自然之论，不识所谓有无混一之常；若谓万象为太虚中所见之物，则物与虚不相资，形自形，性自性，形性、天人不相待而有，陷放浮屠以山河大地为见病之说。此道不明，正由懵者略知体虚空为性，不知本天道为用，反以人见之小因缘天地. I have slightly modified W. Chan's (1963:502) translation of this passage.

13.*Taixu ji qi* (太虚即气) is probably one of Zhang Zai's most difficult sentences to interpret. Li Xiaochun (2012:248–258) has reconstructed the history of the interpretations of this expression, which in total are three: (1) 'the Great void is *qi*', (2) 'the Great Void is in harmony with *qi*' and (3) 'the Great Void is *qi* and they are in perfect harmony'. The latter is more apt than previous ones, because it is the interpretation given by Zhang Zai's ancient readers.

aspects of the same substance. On the other hand, the mutation of the forms of *qi* is in harmony with the Great Void because it occurs within it and is caused and ruled by it. The meaning of this harmony is double. On the one hand, the Great Void is the space where the forces of *yin* and *yang* act and the cycle of transformation of *qi* takes place. On the other hand, the Great Void exists within the forms of *qi*. This not only implies that all forms of *qi* substantially are the Great Void and are invariably bound to disperse and return to it, but this also implies that within every form of *qi* there is some *qi* without form. The Great Void within the forms is Heaven's nature (*tian xing* 天性). As the Great Void is unique and simple, Heaven's nature is the same for all existing things, and all of them are linked together by means of it.

Being *per se* as substance (*ti*), being *per aliud* as function (*yong*)

In the philosophical systems of both philosophers, the categories of *per se* – *per aliud* and substance (*ti*) – function (*yong*) explain the relationship between unity and multiplicity and between the absolute and the relative. From the point of view of Zhang Zai's philosophy, the supreme nature, which is *per se*, possesses all the characteristics of the substance (*ti*). Firstly, being *per se* is an absolute and undifferentiated unity. Therefore, as with Zhang Zai's substance, it cannot be known by reason directly, but only through the medium of being *per aliud*. Secondly, being *per se* and substance are the cause and the source of all existing things. Both are present in the sensible world because every form of existence is an emanation of them, but their authentic nature transcends any particular object or concept. From the point of view of Anselm's philosophy, the Great Void, which is the substance of the world, can be considered as a being *per se*, because it is that through which everything exists and beyond which nothing exists. In fact, Zhang Zai states that precisely 'because the Great Void is the *qi* and they are in perfect harmony, non-being does not exist' (*Zhengmeng* 1, 8, 14);[14] that is, the Great Void is being in the most absolute sense, and everything exists within it and in unity with it.

If being *per se* corresponds to substance, consequently being *per aliud* corresponds to function (*yong*). Both of these categories depend ontologically on being *per se* and on substance and are a partial expression of them. In fact, the being *per aliud* can resemble being *per se*, but its resemblance will always be imperfect. On the other hand, the function represents only one of the two aspects of the substance and is therefore an incomplete representation of it. However, it is only thanks to their imperfection and partiality that the function and the being *per aliud* can be rationally known. Moreover, the knowledge of function and being *per aliud* leads to an awareness of the existence of the substance and the being *per se*, which is their cause. Therefore, any rational knowledge of substance and being *per se* cannot prescind from function and being *per aliud*. Although both Anselm and Zhang Zai were aware that rational knowledge, based on

14.太虚即气，则无无.

function and being *per aliud*, cannot lead to a perfect understanding of the being *per se* or the substance, to achieve this goal, it is necessary to find an alternative way, which for Anselm is the way of faith, while for Zhang Zai it is the way of authenticity (*cheng* 诚).[15]

On the basis of these common elements, it is possible to compare the way in which the two philosophers conceive the absolute and the multiplicity whereof it derives. We start from the first aspect. Anselm conceives the absolute as the standard of the hierarchy of being at the highest degree. Therefore, the supreme nature is good, great, being and better in an absolute meaning. However, when these qualities are at their highest degree, they become indistinguishable from each other and identify themselves with the supreme nature itself. Although the supreme nature in its authentic essence is ineffable and not rationally knowable, nevertheless this is thought as a maximum, an extreme of an implicit opposition. The contraries of the qualities of the supreme nature (i.e. evil, small, not-being and worse) have no ontological reality but depend on the supreme nature, as they are nothing but its relative negation. On the contrary, according to Zhang Zai, the absolute is the absence of any opposition that arises from the perfect harmony of opposites. The Great Void is neither *yin* nor *yang*, but it is the bottom, the space, from which their opposition emerges and is made possible. Therefore, the fundamental difference between supreme nature and Great Void is that the first is conceived as an extreme, the other as the unity of extremes. The sense of this difference becomes clearer when one compares the relationship between these two types of absolute with the sensible world.

Anselm explains the relationship of being *per se* and being *per aliud* through the principle of participation. As previously discussed, participation entails the existence of a hierarchy of being and consequently entails the existence of a standard of this hierarchy. This hierarchy certainly has the main purpose of serving as an argument for the demonstration of the supreme nature's existence, but it is also useful for understanding the origin of multiplicity. Things *per aliud* are created when imperfect beings emerge from the supreme nature. In this way, the good, the great, the being, the better they are separated from each other. Zhang Zai observed that this happens because they can be defined and receive an ideal form; therefore, they are a function of supreme nature. Everything that has a form also begets its opposite. In other words, if the good is conceived, its definition defines by contrast also what is not good. Therefore, the participation of the being *per aliud* with the being *per se* produces the multiplicity in the same way that the Great Void causes the development of the two opposite forces of *yin* and *yang*. The supreme nature is the cause of the existence of a multiplicity that is not contradictory, because as universal standard it allows all things that exist *per aliud* to be commensurable with each other. Similarly, the Great Void unifies the opposites *yin* and *yang* and maintains the consistence of the process of mutation of *qi*.

In conclusion, the categories of being *per se* and being *per aliud* are synonymous with the categories of substance (*ti*) and function (*yong*) because they describe the relationship between the absolute and the sensible world, in order to show the unity that substantiates the multiplicity of reality. Anselm's purpose is to demonstrate the existence of a supreme nature, starting from the observation of what exists through him. Therefore, he emphasises the necessary existence of an immutable unity within the multiplicity, which is being *per se*. On the other hand, the aim of Zhang Zai is to demonstrate the reality of the sensible world and the harmonic union between it and its substance (*ti*). Therefore, he emphasises the process of change itself and, through his theory of *qi*, he demonstrates that every element of multiplicity is nothing but the temporary and partial form of an absolute substance.

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15.According to Zhang Zai, the end of human life is to be in perfect harmony with Heaven, that is, with the formless *qi*. To reach this goal, it is necessary to have perfect knowledge of all the phenomena of the universe (*ming* 明) and to act in an authentic way (*cheng* 诚), that is in full awareness of one's role in the universe. Knowledge and authenticity are two inseparable aspects of wisdom. Knowledge can be reached through a discursive and rational reasoning, while authenticity is an intuitive understanding that can be achieved only through an enlightenment (Yang 2008:135–136).

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