Ziporyn, Brook (2015). "Harmony as a substance. Zhang Zai's metaphysics of polar relations," in: Li, Chenyang & Franklin Perkins (ed.) (2015). Chinese Metaphysics and its Problems, Cambridge University Press, 171–191.



Chinese philosophy rields weird-seeming but (thus) especially interesting kinds of

example: Zhang Zai's harmony-centered monism.

Since 'harmony' refers to a way things can be related to one another (in harmony), it doesn't qualify as a substance (which is never of anything).

principle of his monism.

That harmony could be a (let alone the one) substance sounds absurd!

20K /

It is a form of Still, Zhang existence Zai's view is a monism: harmony is all there is

Question:

Assuming that Zhang Zai

respond to these five

problems?

That we find this absurd should make us wonder whether this is still metaphysics or something else (but what?)...

1) How is one to characterize the ONE—is it to be modeled

on some finite experiential or conceptual item or negatively

as that which defies all finite differentiations?

2) If the former, does the modeling create a metaphor or

something else?

3) How does the allegedly unified ONE produce the finite

entities of experience? [Problem of the One and the Many]

4) How do the many things both express and distort the One?

5) How is the ordinary (mistaken?) experience of the many

grounded in or otherwise related to the monistic truth?

Conciliatory Suggestion: drop talk of substance altogether

Suggestion: Monists take some term from

experience as the primal metaphor for the

ONE & the character of this metaphor does

a lot of the work in addressing the typical

problems monists must address.

standing substances can't possibly have

Reason: It doesn't fit Chinese

If that's the way to go, then Zhang and those he refers to may not actually be ontological foundationalists, but something else.

Questions:

How to characterize

his factor, this ONE?

How can there be

alternative answers

as to what this **ONE**

is like, whence do

they derive, and

what are their

consequences?

Nothing can stand alone, so substances.

is is a *areat*

medium in virtue of which the

existence of an all-pervasive factor

or medium, a ONE

I will keep taking about harmony Substance monists, in as a foundational substance and denying substantiality to all suggest that we need to rewrite lesser things, anyway drop the concept of 'substance'. the original notion of a substance: i.e., of something that interacts with other

> Claim: This really is almost he same as doing substanceless metaphysics and embracing some sort of interdependent holism.

substances.

Monism, as I understand it (and what I think Zhang holds), is the view that only one entity really exists.

1) The ONE is modeled on a particular: qi, which is capable of providing an intuitive sense in which harmony and voidness can be thought of as aspects of one and the same thing: Being-qi is the predicate of something more basic: the Great Harmony. Open question: what (if anything) is ontologically prior? Qi? Lis a monist, how does he Harmony? Voidness? And how are we to tell?

- 2) The one is not modeled on a metaphor, but on something concretely before us: qi.
- 3) The polar structure of harmonizing extremes is imported into the absolute monistic unity; the real voidness itself is Harmony of voidness and non-voidness.
- 4) All concrete things are voidness/qi/Harmony, they express it like the ice cube is and expresses water, though if viewed as the particular only, i.e., without viewing it also as voidness/qi/Harmony, the expressior of its nature is obstructed.
 - 5) Ordinary experience is a smaller, limited example of Harmony, of transcending the border between inside and outside. True knowledge is a more expansive version of the overcoming of such boundaries.

Whatever is somehow describable (even as

indescribable) is Being [implied: even the Daoist

notion of Nonbeing & the Buddhist notion of sunyata

(emptiness) are kinds of Being].



reading of the

inscription

Especially in the so-called Eastern inscription (Bian Yu), Zhang Zai sets forth his own metaphysical views and his rejection of Buddhist and Daoist world views.

Qi is inherently polarized and contains both a tendency to

veer to voidness (the lack of images) and the tendency to

generate spirit and substance [Nature], creating a continuous

alternation between dispersal and aggregation.

Zhang's aim: reinterpret the heterodox notion of

- b) the alternation of life and death as an expression of

nature of the totality

Mental conceptions (like everything else, really—Zhang is a monist, after all) are a dynamic and flows subcategory of qi in some condensed

The *exemplary human* will not mistake

their being constituted in some specific

way as their whole nature. Those who

make such a mistake have a distorted

understanding of their nature.

Nature is also good, the

great harmony, a quality

that it never loses, not

even in its individual forms.

Ordinary *perception* is a way to overcome one-sidedness as it joins the inner and the outer. As such, it is a (narrow) manifestation of the Great Harmony.

Sensual perception, if overrated, can be a *fetter* [chair It can also be the starting point of becoming a sage,

The sage's knowledge, a.k.a. the knowing of Heaven, is fully attuned to the true nature of being, i.e., the true unity of things as the ongoing joining of opposites, in which all beings take part. The absolute nature of things is interaction.

Against the Buddhists:

The Buddhists desire to be free of samsāra

Note: Buddhism is not one monolithic block. We, too, have come across a few schools only (Abhidharma, Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka, Yogācāra, Hua yan), but there are many more.

Final evaluation:

What about Zhang Zai's view makes it special & interestingly distinct?

Zhang Zai integrates two ideas: Idea 1: voidness is the dispersed

formlessness of qi. Idea 2: qi is the concretion of voidness.

The nature of the ONE is a necessary and harmonious ebb and flow between these opposite poles.

Consequently:

which avoids the Problem of the One and the Many.

ontological priority which qualifies Zhang Zai's metaphysics as a

Zhang Zai used his conception to justify the (Confucian) importance (& ines-capability) of social-role relationships in the human realm, opposed to the notions of emptiness (Buddhism) & Nonbeing (Daoism).

Western monisms (priority & existence) prioritize independence & transcendence, ground Harmony of things on them. Zhang Zai's monism seems to reverse these relations.

Suspicion: Garfield might insist that Nāgārjuna's correct to claim that emphasis on interdepend dence fits Zhang Zai's view better than he may think.



To understand this double-sided nature of ai is the key to understanding the nature of all opposites in human life, such as, e.g., ..

day & night

life & death

there are two distinct natures: qi-constitution Nature & Heaven-and-

Earth-Nature. I don't think this is necessary. Nature, for Zhang, is one,

describable in many ways, always a unification of opposed polarities.

like the freezing and melting of ice in water.

shape—is there, sometimes it is not. Either way,

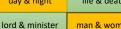


Whether Zhang Zai's objection to the Buddhists is fair may turn on what they think mokṣa (liberation) is, exactly.

Question: Is Zhang Zai (all?) Buddhists have the wrong view of nature?







man & woman This polarized doubleness (yin & yang) is Nature Side remark: Some scholars (e.g., Kasoff) hold that Zhang thinks that