

A Coupled Car-Parrinello Molecular Dynamics and EXAFS Data Analysis Investigation of Aqueous Co^{2+} .

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Abstract

We have studied the microscopic solvation structure of Co^{2+} in liquid water by means of DFT-based Car-Parrinello molecular dynamics simulations and EXAFS data analysis. The effect of the number of explicit water molecules in the simulation box on the first and second hydration shell structures has been considered. Classical molecular dynamics simulations, using an effective two-body potential for Co^{2+} -water interactions, were also performed in order to show box size effects in a larger range. We have found that the number of explicit solvent molecules has a marginal role on the first solvation shell structural parameters, while larger boxes can be necessary to provide a better description of the second solvation shell. Car-Parrinello simulations were found to provide a reliable description of structural and dynamical properties of Co^{2+} in liquid water. In particular, they seem to correctly describe both first and second hydration shells. The EXAFS signal was reconstructed from Car-Parrinello simulations. A good agreement between theoretical and experimental signal was found, thus strengthening the microscopic picture of Co^{2+} solvation properties obtained by first-principles simulations.

1 Introduction

The knowledge of the hydration structure of transition metal ions in aqueous solution is of fundamental importance to understand their solvation properties and chemical reactivities. A large number of studies have been performed on this topic, both experimentally¹⁻³ and theoretically.^{4,5} From the theoretical point of view, molecular dynamics (MD) and Monte Carlo simulations are the preferential modeling techniques to provide a microscopic picture of ionic solutions. Due to their relatively low computational cost, classical MD simulations were used intensively in the past years.⁶⁻¹² Recently, effective ion-water two-body classical potentials have been developed starting from quantum mechanical *ab initio* calculations in which the many-body ion-water terms are accounted for by the polarizable continuum model.¹³⁻¹⁵ All the classical MD methods, however, suffer the limitation of the transferability, as a given potential cannot be used to describe different metal-solvent interactions or weakly binding interactions of the metal with other ligand molecules that can be present in solution. In fact, a major interest in modeling transition metals in solution is aimed at the understanding of interactions not only with the solvent but also with other coordinating molecules.

Classical potential limitations can be circumvented by performing electronic structure calculations. Among these methods, Car-Parrinello molecular dynamics (CPMD) simulations – based on Density Functional Theory (DFT) – provide such a theoretical framework, which has become very popular in the past ten years. These simulations can be applied in gas,¹⁶⁻¹⁸ liquid¹⁹⁻²¹ and solid^{22,23} phase.

CPMD simulations have been reported in the literature for several metal ions in aqueous solution, namely Li^+ ,²⁴ Be^{2+} ,²⁵ Na^+ ,²⁶⁻²⁸ Mg^{2+} ,²⁹ Al^{3+} ,³⁰ K^+ ,³¹ Ca^{2+} ,³² Fe^{2+} ,^{33,34} Cu^{2+} ,³⁵ Ag^+ ,²⁷ Fe^{3+} ,³⁶ Cr^{3+} ³⁷ and Co^{3+} ,³⁸ with varying degrees

of success. CPMD simulations of anions and neutral metal atoms in solution have also been published, as for example the study of bromide ion solvation reported by Raugai and Klein³⁹ and the neutral silver dipolar atom in water reported by Spezia et al.⁴⁰

X-ray absorption spectroscopy (XAS) is a very powerful technique to shed light onto the hydration structure of metal cations,⁴¹ and in particular to investigate the short-range environment around selected atomic species in condensed matter. Due to the broad correlation function toward the large distances and to the finite mean-free path of the photoelectron, the sensitivity of extended X-ray absorption fine structure (EXAFS) is limited to the neighborhood (about 4-5 Å) of the photoabsorber atom. Although the experimental characterization of disordered systems over the full range of distances is hampered by the short-range sensitivity, EXAFS has been proved to provide structural information on the first hydration shell of ionic solutions, which is not possible with other experimental techniques.^{6,42-44} The XAS chemical selectivity is of particular interest since it allows one to deal with complex systems (containing a large number of atoms) and with diluted samples. For such systems it appears very often that XAS is the only structural tool that can be profitably used. Moreover, whereas pair distribution functions can also be obtained by diffraction techniques, EXAFS spectroscopy offers a unique opportunity to determine higher order correlation functions describing the ion-solvent associations that exist in solution.^{42,43,45} Recent investigations carried out on aqueous solutions of 3d metal ions have shown that the EXAFS technique can be used to assess the reliability of structural results obtained from computer simulations.⁴⁶ The combination of MD simulations and EXAFS spectroscopy is a well known performing "tandem" technique to unravel the structure of ionic solutions, especially for metal cations in a *disordered*

environment.^{6,7,46,47} Reconstruction of the EXAFS signal using computer simulations is generally performed from classical molecular dynamics data.⁴¹ To the best of our knowledge, only one Born-Oppenheimer *ab initio* MD study of liquid $\text{In}_{100-x}\text{Se}_x$ alloys has been reported in the literature⁴⁸ to reconstruct the EXAFS signal using the multiple-scattering (MS) theory.

In the present work we report a direct comparison between Car-Parrinello MD simulations and EXAFS based on the reconstruction of the experimental signal using MS theory. To the best of our knowledge this is the first time that such a comparison is made to understand the hydration structure of ions in solution. The EXAFS theoretical signal was calculated using the two-body and three-body distribution functions obtained from CPMD simulations, and it was compared to the experimental data without any fitting procedure. This CPMD-EXAFS combined approach has been applied to the study of the Co^{2+} hydration structure to assess the reliability of our computational scheme. Understanding cobalt behavior in aqueous solution is an important theoretical question related to its toxicological activity. This metal, needed at trace level in organisms for the bio-synthesis of vitamin B12, is a typical polluting agent issued from several industrial processes. It is also an important radioactive contaminating species, especially the ^{60}Co isotope. Thus, we have begun combined theoretical and experimental studies of cobalt properties in biological and environmental relevant systems.^{17,49} As a result of our previous theoretical efforts, we have demonstrated the validity of Co^{2+} pseudo-potential and Car-Parrinello set-up in describing Co-cysteine, Co-Glutathion and Co-water interactions in the gas phase.¹⁷ Concerning the Co^{2+} hydration structure, we report here a study aimed at assessing the reliability of Car-Parrinello MD simulations in reproducing EXAFS data for Co^{2+} in liquid water. Recent experimental EXAFS studies were performed by some of us.⁴⁶

An effective two-body classical Co^{2+} -water potential was developed¹³ in order to study Co^{2+} solvation. Moreover, a QM/MM molecular dynamics study of aqueous Co^{2+} was recently presented by Rode’s group, providing another independent benchmark for our study.⁵⁰

The outline of the remainder of the text is as follows. In section 2.1 and 2.2 we describe the Car-Parrinello and classical molecular dynamics set-up respectively, while in section 2.3 we present the EXAFS measurements and data analysis details. Results are presented in section 3, divided into solvation structure description (section 3.1) and reconstruction of the EXAFS signal from MD data compared with experiments (section 3.2). The behavior of first and second hydration shells is discussed in section 4.1 and 4.2, respectively. Finally, in section 5, we summarize our work and draw some conclusions.

2 Methods

2.1 Car-Parrinello Molecular Dynamics

We performed Car-Parrinello molecular dynamics simulations^{51,52} of Co^{2+} ion immersed in liquid water. Two cubic boxes of different dimensions were considered, consisting of 32 (cubic edge of 9.87 Å) and 64 (cubic edge of 12.42 Å) water molecules, respectively. The box dimension is chosen so as to reproduce the water density at 300 K. Periodic boundary conditions were applied. The electronic structure of the valence electrons was described by DFT using the BLYP functional^{53,54} within the LSD (Local Spin Density) representation. The Co^{2+} ion was considered in a quartet state, corresponding to the experimental spin state,⁵⁵ and to previous calculations within the framework of a continuum description of the solvent.¹³ The valence electron wave function was expanded in plane waves with

an energy cutoff of 90 Ry. This relatively high value is needed to ensure energy convergence, as we have recently reported.¹⁷ Note that this requirement makes our CPMD calculations more computationally expensive in comparison to other simulations of metal cations in bulk water where the plane wave cutoff used was slightly lower, in the 60–80 Ry range.^{36,38}

Medium soft norm-conserving pseudopotentials of the Trouillier-Martins type⁵⁶ were used. Standard Trouillier-Martins pseudo-potentials of O and H atoms were used, as in several Car-Parrinello studies. The electronic structure of Co^{2+} is $[\text{Ar}]3d^74s^0$. Thus, as reported by Rovira et al.⁵⁷ and by some of us,¹⁷ the adopted cobalt pseudo-potential retains only the $3d^7$ and $4s^0$ electronic levels as valence states. Other details on the Co^{2+} pseudo-potential parameters and their validation have been reported elsewhere.¹⁷ Energy expectations were calculated in reciprocal space using the Kleinman-Bylander transformation.⁵⁸ We also applied nonlinear core correction⁵⁹ (with core-charge radius of 1.2 a.u.) which partially accounts for the nonlinearity in the exchange-correlation potential. This is especially recommended for transition metals.

All Car-Parrinello simulations were done with the program package CPMD⁶⁰ in the NVE ensemble. Initial configurations were obtained from 2 ps equilibrated classical molecular dynamics of the solute-solvent system (see next subsection for details). The system was subsequently equilibrated via 1 ps CPMD with initial velocities obtained from a Maxwell distribution centered on 300 K. Car-Parrinello data were then collected over 5 ps of simulation runs, without control of the temperature. The average temperature was $293 \text{ K} \pm 10 \text{ K}$. We used a relatively small fictitious electron mass of 400 a.u. in order to improve the bulk water description, as recently suggested by Galli et al.⁶¹ in their studies of pure liquid water. Moreover, as previously done by some of us,¹⁷ we used a time step

of 4 a.u. (0.097 fs) which is smaller with respect to other CPMD simulations of metal cations in liquid water.

The two sets of CPMD simulations, using 32 and 64 water molecules in the simulation box (with periodic boundary conditions), will be referred in the following as CPMD-32 and CPMD-64 respectively. We also will be using our gas phase dynamical structure of a $[\text{Co}(\text{H}_2\text{O})_6]^{2+}$ cluster from our previous Car-Parrinello simulation data of Ref.¹⁷ It will be referred as CPMD-6.

2.2 Classical Molecular Dynamics

Classical molecular dynamics (CLMD) of Co^{2+} in aqueous solution were performed using boxes with an increasing number of water molecules. We used 32, 64, 216 and 1000 water molecules in the NVE ensemble applying periodic boundary conditions to simulate bulk systems. Long range interactions were treated using the Ewald summation method.⁶² The system was equilibrated at 300 K during 2 ps. Production runs were subsequently collected for 1 ns. Newton's equations of motion were solved numerically using the velocity Verlet algorithm using a 1 fs time step. Dynamics were performed with our own developed code.⁶³ The SPC/E water model was used,⁶⁴ and Co^{2+} -water interaction energies were evaluated using the effective two-body potential recently proposed by Chillemi et al.:¹³

$$V = \sum_I \left(\frac{q_{\text{Co}}q_I}{r_{\text{Co}I}} + \frac{A_I}{r_{\text{Co}I}^4} + \frac{B_I}{r_{\text{Co}I}^6} + \frac{C_I}{r_{\text{Co}I}^8} + \frac{D_I}{r_{\text{Co}I}^{12}} \right) + E_O e^{-F_0 r_{\text{Co}O}} \quad (1)$$

where I runs over oxygen and hydrogen atoms, while the exponential contribution is added only for oxygen. Parameters were fitted to Co^{2+} -water *ab initio* potential energy surface where the many-body ion-water terms were taken

into account by means of the conductor-like polarizable potential method,⁶⁵ as presented in Ref.¹³

In the following we will refer to these classical simulations as CLMD-32, CLMD-64, CLMD-216 and CLMD-1000. We recall that Chillemi et al.¹³ have performed classical molecular dynamics simulations of Co^{2+} in a box of 819 water molecules, using the same force field, in the NVT ensemble using a cut-off for treating long range interactions. In what follows we will refer to this simulation as CLMD-819.

2.3 EXAFS measurements and data analysis

EXAFS measurements. – A 0.2M Co^{2+} aqueous solution was obtained by dissolving the appropriate amount of $\text{Co}(\text{NO}_3)_2$ in freshly distilled water that was acidified to about pH=2.5 by adding HNO_3 . The EXAFS spectrum at the Co K-edge was recorded in transmission mode using the EMBL spectrometer at DESY.⁶⁶ Measurements were performed at room temperature with a Si(220) double-crystal monochromator and 50 % harmonic rejection achieved by slightly detuning the two crystals from parallel alignment.⁶⁷ Three spectra were recorded and averaged after performing an absolute energy calibration.⁶⁸ The DORIS III storage ring was running at an energy of 4.4 GeV with positron currents between 70 and 40 mA. The solution was kept in a cell with Kapton film windows and a Teflon spacer of 1 mm.

Data analysis. – The relation between the EXAFS $\chi(k)$ signal and the local structure, defined through the n-body distribution functions, contains the integrals of the two-atom ($\gamma^{(2)}$), three-atom ($\gamma^{(3)}$) and n-atom ($\gamma^{(n)}$) signals which can be calculated using the multiple-scattering (MS) theory.⁶⁹ In "conventional" EXAFS data analysis of disordered systems only two-body distributions are considered,

and the $\chi(k)$ signal is represented by the equation:

$$\chi(k) = \int_0^\infty dr 4\pi\rho r^2 g(r) A(k, r) \sin [2kr + \phi(k, r)] \quad (2)$$

where $A(k, r)$ and $\phi(k, r)$ are the amplitude and phase functions, respectively, and ρ is the density of the scattering atoms. Recent investigations have shown that MS effects within the first hydration shell have to be accounted for to perform an accurate analysis of the EXAFS spectra of transition metal ions in aqueous solution.^{42,46} MS contributions are detectable for Co^{2+} as 3d transition metal ions form quite stable octahedral complexes, at variance with alkaline and earth-alkaline ions having highly diffuse and poorly defined hydration spheres. $\chi(k)$ theoretical signals can be calculated by introducing in Eq. 2 the model radial distribution functions obtained from classical (CL) or Car-Parrinello (CP) molecular dynamics simulations. Both the Co-O and Co-H $g(r)$'s obtained from the simulations have been used to calculate the single scattering first shell $\chi(k)$ theoretical signal, as the ion-hydrogen interactions have been found to provide a detectable contribution to the EXAFS spectra of transition metal ions in aqueous solutions.⁴⁶ Moreover, we have included the three-body contributions within the first hydration shell. The strongest MS signals are generated by the three linear O-Co-O scattering paths in the octahedral hydration complex. Therefore, we have also considered the contributions associated with the $g(r_1, r_2, \theta)$ distributions obtained from CPMD simulations. The orientation of water molecules in the first coordination shells has been obtained from the analysis of the O-Co-O triangular configurations that show well defined peaks at $\theta \simeq 90^\circ$ and $\theta \simeq 180^\circ$ in agreement with the expected octahedral coordination of this ion. Comparison of the theoretical and experimental total $\chi(k)$ signals allows the reliability of the

$g(r)$'s, and consequently of the theoretical scheme used in the simulations, to be checked.

The EXAFS theoretical signals associated with all the two- and three-body distributions have been calculated by means of the GNXAS program and a thorough description of the theoretical framework for the multiple scattering analysis can be found in Ref.⁶⁹ Phase shifts, $A(k,r)$ and $\phi(k,r)$, have been calculated starting from one of the CLMD-819 configurations as previously reported,⁴⁶ by using muffin-tin potentials and advanced models for the exchange-correlation self-energy (Hedin-Lundqvist).⁷⁰ The values of the muffin-tin radii are 0.2 Å, 0.9 Å, and 1.2 Å for hydrogen, oxygen, and cobalt, respectively. Inelastic losses of the photoelectron in the final state have been intrinsically accounted for by complex potential. The imaginary part also includes a constant factor accounting for the core-hole width (1.33 eV).⁷¹

It is well known that the atomic background of several elements contains important contributions associated with the opening of multi-electron excitation channels. Here the background function used to extract the $\chi(k)$ experimental signals has been modeled by means of step-shaped functions accounting for the 1s3p and 1s3s double-electron resonances. The energy onsets and the intensities of these channels were taken from previous determinations.^{46,72} The S_0^2 parameter, which accounts for an overall intensity rescaling, and E_0 which aligns the experimental and theoretical energy scales were taken from the analysis reported in Ref.⁴⁶

3 Results

3.1 Solvation Structure

The Co^{2+} ion in aqueous solution is well known to be coordinated by six water molecules⁵⁵ and this hexa-coordinated structure is observed in all our simulations (both classical and DFT-based). A typical octahedral-like arrangement of water molecules in the Co^{2+} first hydration shell is shown in Figure 1.

Structural arrangements of water molecules around Co^{2+} are investigated by computing Co-O and Co-H radial distribution functions and results are collected in Figure 2 for CPMD-32, CPMD-64, CLMD-32, CLMD-64, CLMD-216 and CLMD-1000. In the same figure we show the Co-O and Co-H first shell radial distribution functions obtained from the EXAFS analysis, with associated error bars.⁴⁶ Structural characterization of the first hydration shell is completed by O-Co-O angle distribution (see Figure 3). The second hydration shell is characterized through the Co-O second peak distances and the number of water molecules located on average in the second solvation shell. All these data are summarized in Table I together with previous theoretical results.^{13,50}

The most evident feature in the Co-O $g(r)$ global behavior is that Car-Parrinello radial distribution functions are less sharp than experimental ones, while their classical analogues are sharper (see Figure 2). This last feature was also found in previously reported classical molecular dynamics.¹³

Differences between CPMD and experimental data can be quantified by fitting the $g(r)$ first peaks with a typical gamma asymmetric distribution (see appendix for details, and Table II). Note that the R_m values reported in Table II are the average distances of the obtained distributions, that are shifted toward larger values with respect to the maximum of the $g(r)$'s of Table I, due to the asymmetry

of the distributions. CPMD simulations slightly overestimate the position of the first Co–O peak (2.15 Å in CPMD-32 and 2.14 Å in CPMD-64) in comparison to experiments (2.09 Å), even if a very small improvement in R_m is obtained by using a larger simulation box. Shorter distances and broader distributions are obtained from CPMD for Co–H distributions. Anyway, these differences, are always very small and of the same order of magnitude of what has been found from distribution peaks analysis by other authors, using different simulation methods.⁵⁰

In Figure 3 we show the distribution of O–Co–O angles taking into account the first hydration shell water molecules as obtained from Car-Parrinello simulations (CPMD-32 and CPMD-64). In both cases we found two peaks at about 90° and 180° corresponding to an octahedral structure (in particular 89° and 170° for CPMD-32 and 90° and 175° for CPMD-64). Note that the 64 water molecule simulation provides two peaks closer to the ideal values, probably because of the better description of outer hydration shells, which consequently provide a finest description of the first hydration shell structure.

Structural analysis is completed by looking at water molecules in the second hydration shell. In Figure 4 we show the number of water molecules in the second hydration shell (CN2) as obtained by CP and CL molecular dynamics with increasing box sizes. The CPMD simulations with the small box (32 water molecules) clearly show that the second hydration shell is not sufficiently well described with this small box and small number of water molecules, and that a larger box is necessary to obtain a better behaved distribution. In CLMD we always obtain well-behaved (unimodal) and well defined peaked distributions probably because of the conjunction of the larger number of water molecules in the box and of the larger simulation time scales. We note that a more complete statistical sampling is useful to improve second shell description even with a small

box size.

In CPMD-64 simulations, the most probable number of water molecules in the second hydration shell is 12, while in CLMD simulations this probability function is centered at 11 water molecules – with large values of the probability also for $CN_2=12$, but always smaller than for $CN_2=11$, as shown in the same figure 4. The mean coordination numbers, shown in Table I, are thus on average 12.5 for CPMD-64 and ~ 11 for all CLMD.

3.2 EXAFS Signal from Car-Parrinello Dynamics

As shown in the previous section, the CPMD-32 and CPMD-64 simulations present only slight differences in the shape and position of the Co-water first shell radial distribution functions. In both cases the Co–O first peak distances are slightly longer as compared to the EXAFS experimental determination. Moreover the mean-square variation factors σ^2 and the asymmetry of the first shell peak obtained from the CPMD simulations are slightly too large. It is well known that EXAFS investigations on ionic solutions can provide not only reliable short-range structural properties but also information on the ligand exchange process in the first hydration shell. Sham was the first to point out that the ligand-exchange rate constant in water solution of 3d metal ions is closely related to the EXAFS Debye-Waller factor.⁷³ More recently Miyanaga et al.⁷⁴ showed that the σ^2 values do not reflect the real ligand exchange but rather the strength and stiffness of the ion-oxygen first shell bond. Therefore, the first conclusion that can be drawn is that the CPMD simulations does not reproduce very accurately the kinetic stability of the $[\text{Co}(\text{H}_2\text{O})_6]^{2+}$ complex. This can be due both to the short simulation time and to the theoretical model used (in particular the functional or the atomic pseudo-potential).

Notwithstanding these discrepancies, direct comparison of the CPMD results with the EXAFS experiment data allows a better understanding of the accuracy of the simulations. $\chi(k)$ theoretical signals have been calculated by means of Eq. (2) starting from the CPMD-32 and CPMD-64 Co–O and Co–H $g(r)$'s. The linear and rectangular O–Co–O three-body contributions have been calculated using the angle values obtained from the analysis of the CPMD angular distribution. The average angle values and angle variances σ_θ^2 were determined to be 170° and 12° , and 175° and 12° for the CPMD-32 and CPMD-64 simulations, respectively. The structural parameters derived from the CPMD simulations were kept fixed during the EXAFS analysis. In this way the first hydration shell structure obtained from the simulations can be directly compared with experimental data and the validity of the theoretical framework used in the simulations can be assessed. In the upper panels of Fig. 5 the comparison between the EXAFS experimental signal and the theoretical curves calculated using the CPMD-32 and CPMD-64 $g(r)$'s (left and right panels, respectively) is reported. The $\gamma^{(n)}$ signals are shown multiplied by k squared for better visualization. The first four curves from the top of each panel are the Co–O and Co–H first shell $\gamma^{(2)}$ contributions, and the MS signals associated with the three linear and twelve orthogonal O–ion–O configurations. The remainder of the figures shows the total theoretical contributions compared with the experimental spectra and the resulting residuals. As expected, the dominant contribution to the total EXAFS signal is given by the ion–O first shell signal and as a consequence, the EXAFS structural information is particularly accurate for the shape of the ion–O $g(r)$'s first peaks, only. The amplitude of both the Co–H two-body and MS contributions is below that of the residual curve. Overall, the calculated EXAFS spectra match the experimental data reasonably well in both cases, with R_i values of $0.721 \cdot 10^{-6}$, and $0.707 \cdot 10^{-6}$,

for CPMD-32 and CPMD-64, respectively (see appendix for the definition of this index of agreement). The agreement between the theoretical and experimental $\chi(k)$ signals shows that the structural and dynamical information derived from the CP simulations is basically correct and the size of the box does not affect the behavior of the first hydration shell. Note that the R_i of the CPMD-64 simulation is only slightly smaller than that of the CPMD-32 one.

The Fourier transform (FT) moduli of the EXAFS $\chi(k)k^2$ theoretical, experimental and residual signals are shown in the lower panels of Fig. 5. The FT's have been calculated in the k -range 2.1–13.5 \AA^{-1} with no phase shift correction applied. The FT spectra show a prominent first shell peak which is mainly due to the Co–O first shell distance. Nevertheless, the Co–H FT peaks are located at 2.4 \AA , giving rise to a shoulder on the first peak. The quite good agreement between the FT's of the theoretical and experimental signals proves once more the reliability of the theoretical simulations.

4 Discussion

4.1 First Hydration Shell

We have shown that CPMD simulations provide a first shell Co^{2+} hydration structure in good agreement with EXAFS measurements, even if the theoretical $g(r)$'s are slightly wider and shifted toward longer distances. No box size effects were found on first hydration shell properties, since CPMD-32 and CPMD-64 results are very similar – only angular distributions are slightly better by using the larger box. Note that to obtain qualitatively correct information on the first hydration shell, the computationally less expensive Car-Parrinello set-up with 32 water molecules seems to be enough. Classical simulations, using an effective

two-body metal-water potential are able to provide better results, albeit preliminary accurate *ab initio* potential energy calculations are necessary. CPMD simulations, performed using a BLYP DFT functional, are anyway able to reproduce quite well these structural parameters. Moreover, by recalculating the EXAFS signal from CPMD $g(r)$'s we obtain results that are very similar to the experimental ones. Note that we did not perform any refinement of the theoretical $\chi(k)$ signal calculated from the CPMD data, as the background parameters have been taken from previous works.⁴⁶ The good agreement between simulations and experiments at this fine level of investigations, makes the first-principle approach of CPMD simulations very intriguing to understand the structure of soft matter around transition metal cations. However, some differences were found, indicating some possible CPMD approach limitations, that can be overcome in the near future. The functional used, the pure BLYP, can be responsible for the longer Co–O distances and weaker bonds with corresponding broader distributions. Note that the calculated and experimental $\chi(k)k^2$ signals are almost identical up to 7 \AA^{-1} , while the theoretical curve has a smaller amplitude in the higher k -range. This is reflected in a different amplitude of the FT of the $\chi(k)$ signal. These discrepancies are consistent with the broadening of the $g(r)$'s as determined by CPMD simulations outlined before. However, differences between experimental and CPMD signals related to Co–O structure are very small and the position of the first peak in FT signal is not very affected. We should note that concentration and counterion effects can be also at the origin of these differences. On the other hand, the shortening of the Co–H distances can be due both to the use of the BLYP functional and to an insufficient equilibration time. In fact, hydrogen atoms on the hexacoordinated water molecules should have a slow orientational relaxation time (more than tens of picoseconds⁷⁵). Thus, our

CPMD simulations do not sample correctly this slow dynamics associated with the first-shell water molecules. Note that the smaller Co–H distance is reflected in the second peak of the FT of $\chi(k)k^2$ signal in Figure 5 that is only a shoulder for CPMD data, while it is well defined in the experimental one.

4.2 Second Hydration Shell

To understand the second hydration shell structure a minimum box of 64 water molecules seems to be necessary in CPMD simulations. This means that a bigger computational effort is needed to obtain an accurate description of the second hydration shell. In fact, a unimodal distribution is found for the CPMD-64 simulation at variance with the CPMD-32 one. On the other hand, classical simulations provide the same value of second shell coordination number independently of the box used, probably as a larger temporal sampling supplies the lack of convergence due to the small number of molecules.

It is worth noting that experimental data on the second hydration shell are difficult to obtain at the same level of accuracy as the first hydration shell. Experimental data available in the literature are very spread (the number of water molecules is in the range 5.7–14.8 and the Co–O distance in the range 4.20–4.28 Å) and probably strongly dependent on the experimental conditions^{1,76–79} where different complexes are present and the metal ion is bound also to non-solvent ligands (like i.e. Cl^- or acetate). The results of our CPMD simulations finding 12.5 water molecules on average in the second coordination shell are well inside the experimental boundaries, and provide a reasonable value for extreme dilute solutions. Note also that the second peak in the Co–O $g(r)$ is very broad, providing a location with a large indeterminacy, but still in the correct region (i.e. in the region proposed from both experimental¹ and other theoretical studies^{13,50}).

A more detailed analysis of the second hydration shell, coupling simulations with other experimental techniques as proposed in the following, thus seems necessary.

5 Conclusions

In the present work we have investigated the hydration structure of Co^{2+} by means of Car-Parrinello molecular dynamics simulations and EXAFS data analysis based on the multiple-scattering theory. A detailed comparison between simulations and experiments was made and structural parameters on the first hydration shell were discussed in details, providing a good agreement between the two independent approaches. In particular here, for the first time, we have tested the reliability of DFT-based molecular dynamics in reproducing the experimental EXAFS signal, and the corresponding first hydration shell properties. Results are encouraging. Furthermore, the second hydration shell structure was determined from simulations. Unfortunately, EXAFS cannot provide information on the second hydration shell. In this context, the analysis of the XANES region could overcome these limitations and provide information also on the second hydration shell,¹⁵ as performed for Ni^{2+} using classical simulations.⁸⁰ Our work is moving in this direction in order to couple XANES with Car-Parrinello simulations.

Finally, the Car-Parrinello set-up developed here to describe Co^{2+} in aqueous solutions, together with previously reported results on cobalt–biomolecules interactions in the gas phase,¹⁷ pave the way to study cobalt-biomolecular complexes in liquid water.

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Appendix

EXAFS-CPMD index of agreement – The index of agreement between experimental ($\alpha_{exp}(E_i)$) and Car-Parrinello ($\alpha_{CPMD}(E_i)$) points is defined:

$$R_i = \sum_{i=1}^N \frac{[\alpha_{exp}(E_i) - \alpha_{CPMD}(E_i)]^2}{\sigma_i^2} \quad (3)$$

where N is the number of experimental points E_i and σ_i^2 is the variance associated with each experimental point $\alpha_{exp}(E_i)$. In most cases σ_i^2 can be directly estimated from the experimental spectrum and a k^m weighting (with $m = 2, 3, \dots$) results in a good approximation.⁸¹

Gamma distribution function – Peak shapes of calculated Co–O and Co–H radial distribution functions are modeled with Gamma like distribution curves with mean distance R_m , standard deviation σ and asymmetry index (third cumulant divided by σ^3) $\beta = 2p^{-1/2}$ that can be gradually varied in a wide range. The general expression is

$$f(r) = N_c \frac{p^{1/2}}{\sigma \Gamma(p)} \left[p + \left(\frac{r - R_m}{\sigma} \right) p^{1/2} \right]^{p-1} \exp \left[-p - \left(\frac{r - R_m}{\sigma} \right) p^{1/2} \right] \quad (4)$$

where $\Gamma(p)$ is the Euler's Gamma function for the parameter p and N_c is the coordination number providing the correct normalization.

Note that, as for the Gaussian distribution, the dumping of the $\chi(k)$ signal averaged over Gamma distribution can be calculated exactly:⁶

$$\chi(k) = \mathcal{F} \left[A_0 e^{i\psi_0} \left(1 + i \frac{A_1}{A_0} \frac{\psi_1 \sigma^2}{(1 - i\psi_1 \sigma p^{-1/2})} \right) \frac{e^{i\psi_1 \sigma p^{1/2}}}{(1 - i\psi_1 \sigma p^{-1/2})^p} \right] \quad (5)$$

where $A_0 = A(k, R_m)$, $\psi_0 = \psi(k, R_m)$, $A_1 = \partial A(k, r) / \partial r|_{r=R_m}$ and $\psi_1 = \partial \psi(k, r) / \partial r|_{r=R_m}$ and \mathcal{F} indicates the imaginary part.

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	r_{1Co-O}^a (Å)	r_{1Co-H}^b (Å)	r_{2Co-O}^a (Å)	CN-1st ^c	CN-2nd ^c	θ_{O-Co-O}^d (°)
CPMD-6	2.14	2.82	–	6	–	87;173
CPMD-32	2.12	2.70	4.28	6	13.18±0.95	89;170
CPMD-64	2.10	2.72	4.10	6	12.48±1.29	90;175
CLMD-32	2.07	2.76	4.3	6	11.18±1.54	90;174
CLMD-64	2.07	2.77	4.4	6	11.43±1.43	90;173
CLMD-216	2.07	2.76	4.3	6	11.31±1.28	90;175
CLMD-1000	2.07	2.76	4.3	6	11.48±1.22	90;174
CLMD-819 ^e	2.08	2.78	4.29	6	12.7	90;174
CLMD-499 ^f	2.27	3.0	4.6	5.9	22.7	68;90;173
QM/MM ^f	2.17	2.85	4.6	6	15.9	89;173

Table I: Hydration parameters for Co^{2+} in aqueous solution. ^a first (r_{1Co-O}) and second (r_{2Co-O}) peak maximum of Co–O $g(r)$ in Å. ^b first peak maximum of Co–H $g(r)$ in Å. ^c coordination number of the first (CN-1st) and second (CN-2nd) hydration shell. ^d peaks of the O–Co–O angular distribution function. ^e from Ref.¹³ ^f from Ref.⁵⁰

	CPMD-32	CPMD-64	CLMD-819	EXAFS
Co-O				
R_m (Å)	2.15	2.14	2.09	2.092(2)
σ^2 (Å ²)	0.012	0.015	0.0038	0.0062(5)
β	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.3(1)
N	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0(1)
Co-H				
R_m (Å)	2.75	2.75	2.78	2.78(2)
σ^2 (Å ²)	0.023	0.021	0.010	0.010(4)
β	0.3	0.4	0.0	0.05(9)
N	12.4	12.5	12.1	12.1(2)

Table II: Parameters of the first peak $g(r)$ fitted with a gamma distribution function (see appendix) obtained from CPMD-32 and CPMD-64 simulations and compared with previously reported classical simulations (CLMD-819¹³) and experimental data.⁴⁶

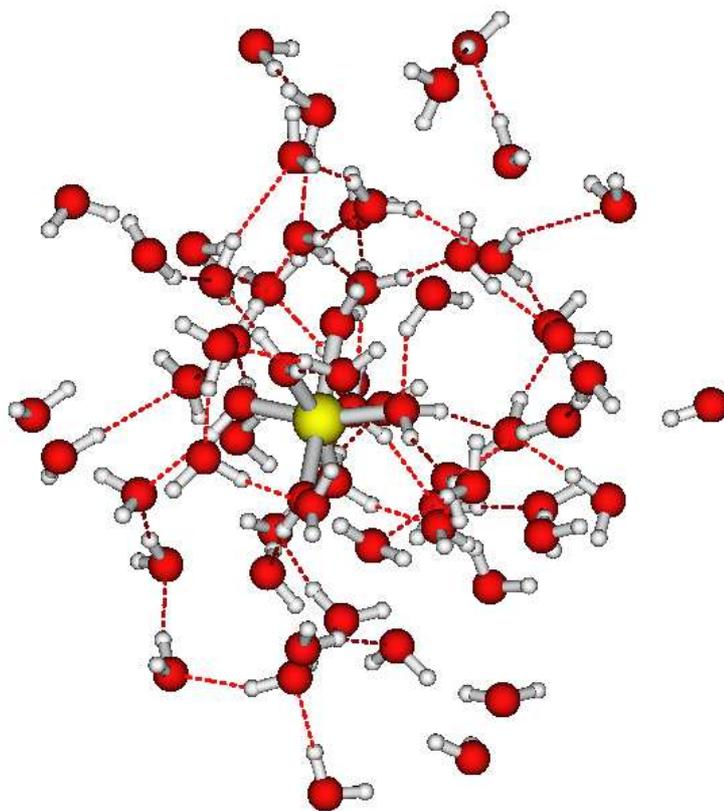


Figure 1: A CPMD-64 snapshot showing a $[\text{Co}(\text{H}_2\text{O})_6]^{2+}$ octahedral structure immersed in water.

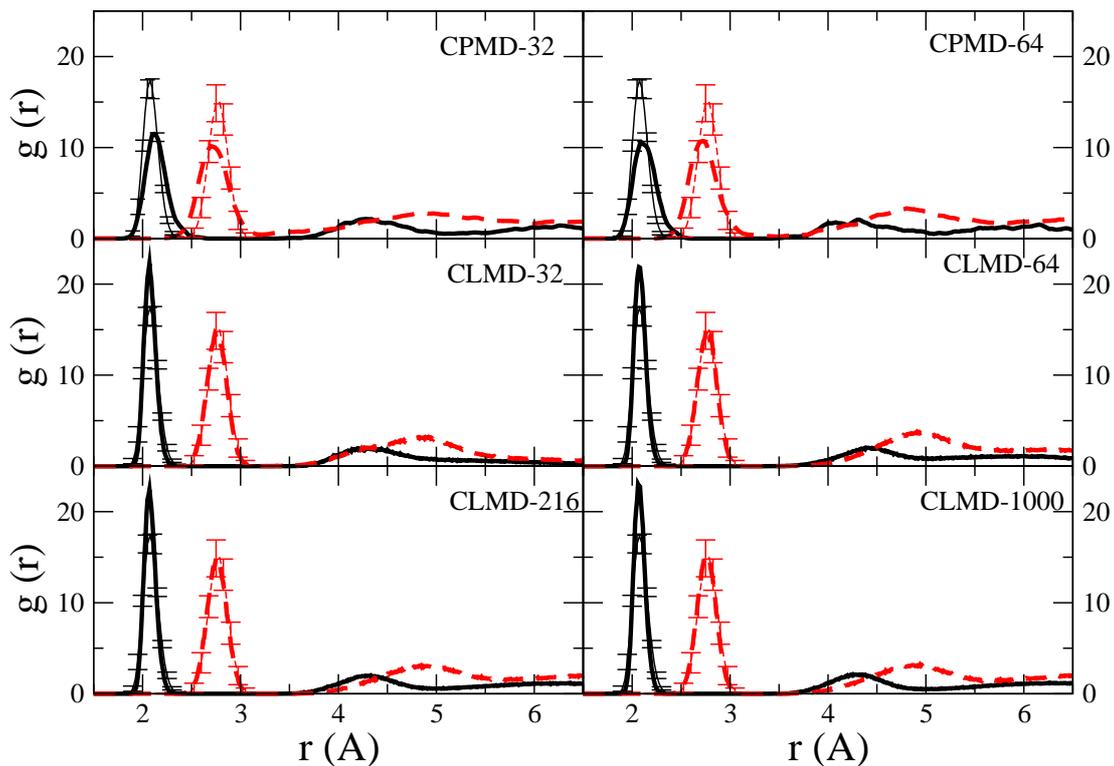


Figure 2: Co-O (thick lines) and Co-H (dashed lines) radial distribution functions obtained from different MD simulations: CPMD-32, CPMD-64, CLMD-32, CLMD-64, CLMD-216 and CLMD-1000. Experimental $g(r)$ evaluated for the first shell from EXAFS measurements⁴⁶ are also reported, with associated errors, for comparison.

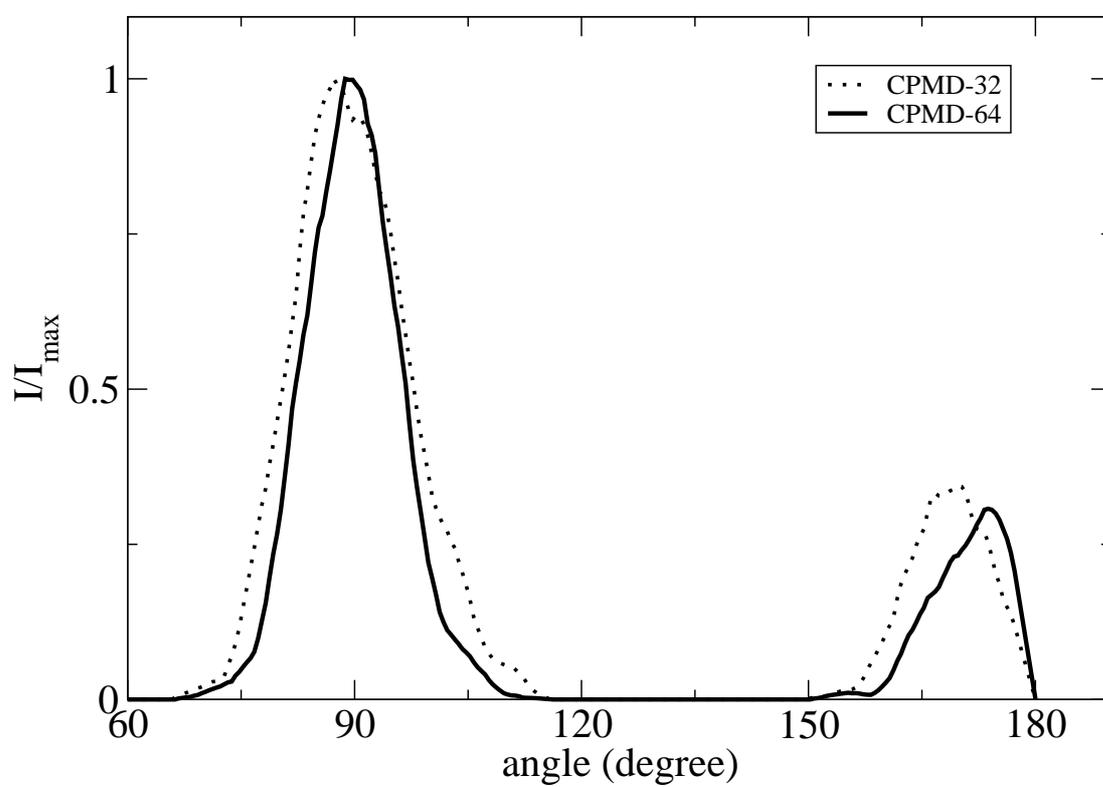


Figure 3: O–Co–O angle distribution obtained from CPMD-32 (dotted line) and CPMD-64 (solid line) simulations.

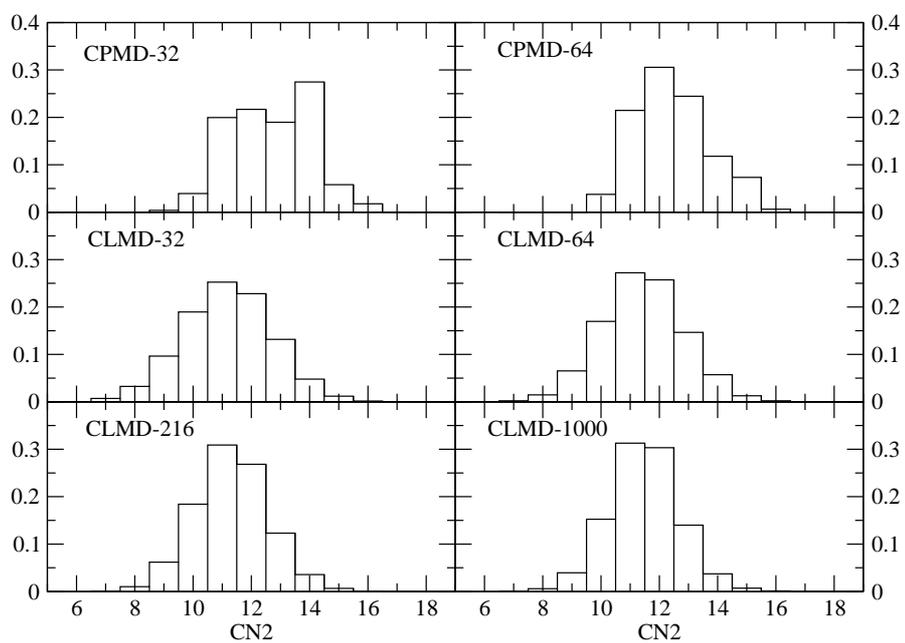


Figure 4: Histograms of water molecules in the second hydration shell of Co^{2+} : a) CPMD-32, b) CPMD-64, c) CLMD-32, d) CLMD-64, e) CLMD-216 and f) CLMD-1000.

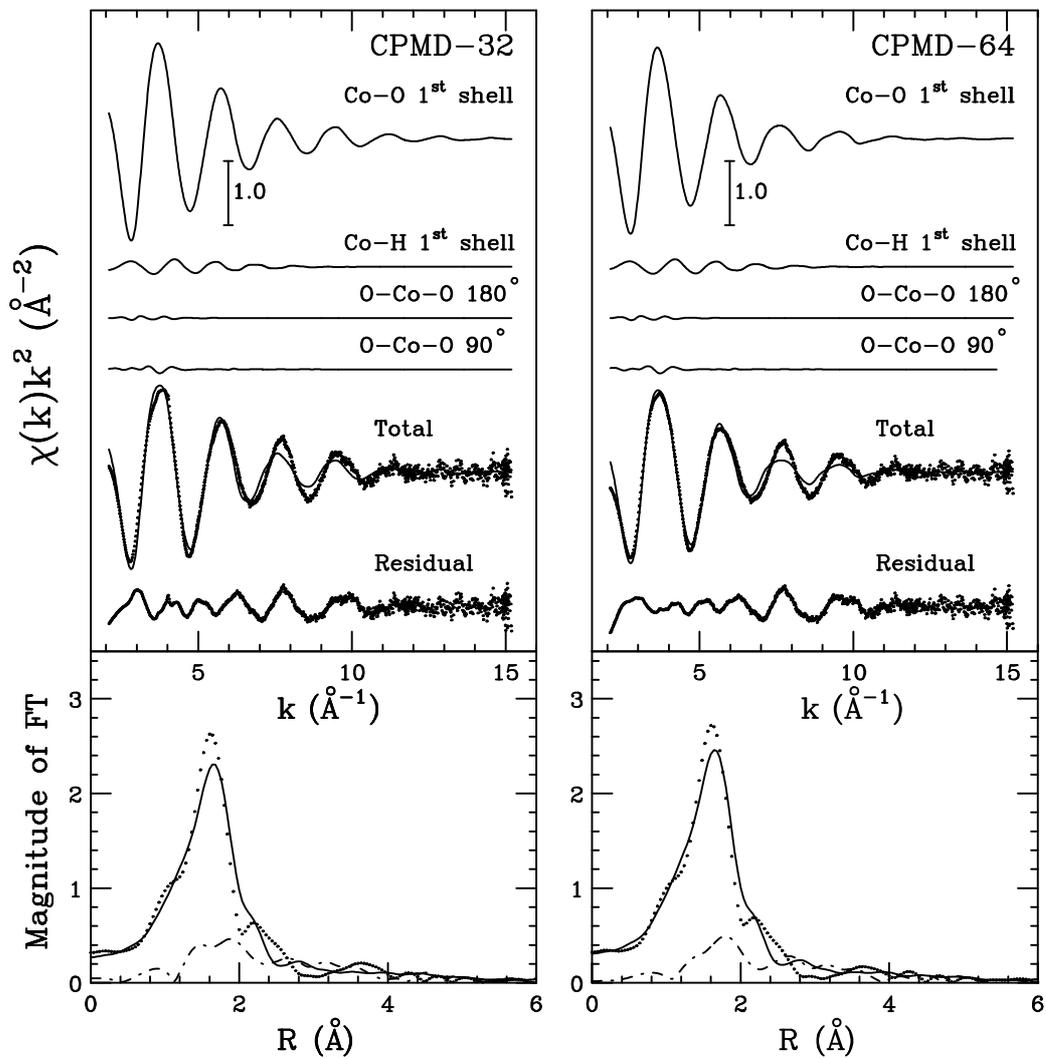


Figure 5: Upper panels: EXAFS signal calculated from CPMD-32 (left side) and CPMD-64 (right side) simulations (solid lines) and obtained from experiments (dotted lines). The residual signals (dashed-dotted lines) are also shown. Lower panels: the Fourier transforms of the calculated (solid lines), experimental (dotted lines) and residual (dashed-dotted lines) signals.