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Spin crossover or intra-molecular electron transfer in a cyanido-bridged Fe/Co dinuclear dumbbell: a matter of state†

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The design of molecule-based systems displaying tuneable optical and/or magnetic properties under external stimuli has received a great deal of attention in the past few years. This interest is driven by the potential applications in high-performance molecule-based electronics in the areas of recording media, switches, sensors, and displays. As an example, three-dimensional Fe/Co Prussian blue compounds exhibit a concomitant change in magnetic and optical properties due to a temperature- or light-induced metal-to-metal electron transfer. The foregoing remarkable properties in Prussian blues prompted us to design soluble molecular fragments of these coordination networks through a rational building-block approach in order to mimic their properties on a single molecule. With a judicious choice of the ligands for the iron and cobalt molecular precursors, we prepared a dinuclear cyanido-bridged Fe/Co complex that exhibits an unexpected temperature-dependent spin crossover in the solid state while an intramolecular electron transfer triggered by protonation is observed in solution.

Introduction

Since the discovery in 1996 of a reversible thermally and photoinduced metal-to-metal electron transfer in the Prussian blue analogue $K_{0.14}$Co$[\text{Fe(CN)}_6]_{0.71} \cdot 4.93\text{H}_2\text{O}$, widespread research efforts have been devoted to new cyanido-based materials exhibiting tuneable optical and magnetic properties as a function of external stimuli. This interest is driven in large part by the potential applications of such materials in energy-efficient, switchable molecule-based information storage or electronic devices.\(^1\)\(^-\)\(^4\) Indeed, several attempts to design three-dimensional (3-D) bimetallic cyanido-bridged networks have successfully led to switchable optical and magnetic molecule-based materials.\(^5\)\(^-\)\(^10\) In these network assemblies, it is important to note that in most of the cases their high dimensionality makes a systematic study of structure–property relationships difficult, and their low solubility limits the shaping of these systems for technological applications.

In this respect, an intense research activity has been recently directed towards molecular fragments of Fe/Co Prussian blues with simple topology and improved solubility. Only in 2004, a molecular $[\text{Fe}_2\text{Co}_2]$ analogue $[[\text{Co(tmphen)}]_{2}\{\text{Co(L}_2)\text{CN}_2\}]_{2} \cdot [\text{A}]_{2}$ with tmphen $= 3,4,7,8$-tetramethyl-1,10-phenanthroline was reported to show thermally induced intramolecular metal-to-metal electron transfer,\(^11\)\(^-\)\(^12\) although a series of dinuclear complexes and molecular squares involving a $\{\text{Fe}-(\mu-\text{CN})\text{Co}\}$ motif were reported before.\(^13\)\(^-\)\(^16\) Then in 2008, a switchable molecular $[\text{Fe}_4\text{Co}_4]$ cube, $[[\text{tpzTp}\text{Fe(CN)}_3]_{2}\{\text{Co(pz)}\text{CCH}_2\text{OH}]_{2} \cdot \{\text{ClO}_4\}_2 \cdot 13\text{DMF} \cdot 4\text{H}_2\text{O}$ (with tpzp = tetrapyrazolylborate and pz$=2,2,2$-tris(pyrazolyl)ethanol), was shown to exhibit both thermally- and photo-induced electron transfer, associated with the transformation of paramagnetic $\{\text{Fe}^{\text{III}}_{\text{LS}}\text{–CN–Co}^{\text{II}}_{\text{LS}}\}$ pairs (LS = low-spin, HS = high-spin) into diamagnetic $\{\text{Fe}^{\text{II}}_{\text{LS}}\text{–CN–Co}^{\text{II}}_{\text{HS}}\}$ pairs exactly like in the family of 3-D Fe/Co Prussian blue analogues.\(^17\) More recently, these magnetic and optical switching properties were also reported in tetraneuclear $[\text{Fe}_2\text{Co}_2]$ squares in the solid state as well as in solution $[[\text{L}_1\text{Fe(CN)}_3]_{2}\{\text{Co(L}_2)\text{CN}_2\}]_{2} \cdot \{\text{A}\}_2$ $\cdot$ $[\text{S}]$, where $L_1$ is a trispyrazolylborate derivative and $L_2$ is a bidentate ligand; A and S are anions and solvents, respectively.\(^18\)\(^-\)\(^21\) The solid-state properties of these $[\text{Fe}_2\text{Co}_2]$ complexes were transferred into a wide range of

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molecular precursors was exploited. In order to leave only one accessible site on the CoII precursor for the cyanido bridge, a pentadentate ligand, 2,6-bis(1,1-di(pyridin-2-yl)ethyl)pyridine (PY5Me2), was chosen as a capping ligand.24 For the FeIII precursor, the tridentate planar 2,6-bis(benzimidazol-2-yl)pyridine ligand (H2BBP) was selected to allow free cyanide groups in a meridional configuration.25 The steric hindrance of both ligands helps in assembling the building blocks in such a way to avoid final compounds with a high dimensional structure, and to shield the desired complex from the neighbouring ones. The stoichiometric reaction of \( \text{[Bu}_4\text{N}]_2[\text{Fe}(\text{BBP})(\text{CN})_3] \) in methanol (1, Fig. S1 and Table S1†) with an acetonitrile solution of \([\text{Co}(\text{PY5Me}_2)(\text{OH}_2)][\text{BF}_4]_2\) (2, Fig. S2 and Table S1†) afforded a dinuclear \([\text{Fe–Co}–\text{CN}–\text{Co}]\) complex, \([\text{BBP}][\text{Fe}(\text{CN})_3\text{Co}(\text{PY5Me}_2)]\)-2.5CH₃OH in high yield (\([\text{FeCo}]\)). \([\text{FeCo}]\) successfully crystallizes as a neutral species in the monoclinic \(P2_1/c\) space group (see Fig. 1 and Table S2†).

As expected, one of the cyanide groups on the Fe-precursor is coordinated to the axial position of the Co-precursor to give the desired \([\text{Fe}[\mu-\text{CN}]\text{Co}]\) motif. At 370 K, average Co–N and Fe–C bond lengths are 2.108(3) Å and 1.943(4) Å, respectively (Table S3†). These values are in close agreement with those expected for CoIIHS and FeIII LS ions, considering the valence bond sum analysis and charge compensation.25–27 In the crystal, the complexes are stabilized through π–π interactions along the crystallographic a direction and σ–π interactions in the ab plane (Fig. S5 and S6†).

The magnetic susceptibility, \(\chi\), of \([\text{FeCo}]\) was measured and is plotted as a \(\chi T\) vs. \(T\) plot in Fig. 2. The “S”-shaped curve observed around 220 K could be the signature of an electron transfer process. The high temperature (360 K) \(\chi T\) value is close to the 3.1 cm³ K mol⁻¹ expected for the sum of the FeIII HS \((S = 1/2, g = 2.26\) obtained for 1) and CoIIHS \((S = 3/2, g = 2.36\) obtained for 2) centres. Nevertheless, an Fe–Co electron

Fig. 2 Temperature dependence of the \(\chi T\) product of \([\text{FeCo}]\). \(\chi\) is the molar magnetic susceptibility that is equal to \(M/H\). Experimental data (black circles) were collected in an applied field of 1000 Oe and the red solid line represents the best fit based on an ideal solution model.28 Inset, zoom of low temperature region. Data were fitted (blue line) by the theoretical susceptibility deduced from the Heisenberg dinuclear isotropic spin Hamiltonian: \(H = -2JS_{\text{Co}}S_{\text{Fe}}\).
transfer should involve the transformation of a paramagnetic \( \{\text{Fe}_{\text{LS}}^{\text{III}}-\text{CN}-\text{Co}_{\text{HS}}^{\text{II}}\} \) pair into a diamagnetic \( \{\text{Fe}_{\text{LS}}^{\text{II}}-\text{CN}-\text{Co}_{\text{LS}}^{\text{III}}\} \) pair, while a significant \( \chi' \) value (0.93 cm\(^{-1}\) K mol\(^{-1}\)) is measured below 100 K. In order to clarify whether this thermal behaviour is due to a partial electron transfer process or another phenomenon involving a change of electronic states, additional crystallographic data were collected at 90 K.

At a first look, the temperature does not have a notable effect on the structure (at 90 and 370 K, \([\text{FeCo}]\) crystallizes in the same \( P2_1/c \) space group), unit-cell parameters and average bond distances (Fig. S4, Tables S2 and S3). Nevertheless, significant differences are seen on individual Co–N bonds and in the geometry of the cobalt coordination sphere. A remarkable elongation of the Co1–N1 and Co1–N2 bonds is observed at 90 K with values of 2.242(3) Å and 2.228(3) Å, respectively (from 2.191(2) Å and 2.182(3) Å at 370 K), while all other Co–N bond lengths decrease by about 0.1 Å. Consequently, the \([\text{Fe}[\mu-\text{CN}]] \text{Co}\) unit becomes more linear, as evidenced by the evolution of the Co–N6–C30 angle from 168.2(3)° at 370 K to 172.3(3)°. The resulting strong distortion of the Co coordination geometry corresponds to the Jahn–Teller effect for a Co\(^{II}\) low spin state induced by the presence of a single electron in \( e_g \) orbitals, as observed in many examples of Co\(^{II}\) spin crossover complexes.\(^{23,24}\) Those features and the unaffected Fe coordination sphere with temperature suggest a thermal spin crossover within the Co\(^{II}\) ion rather than an electron-transfer phenomenon within the Fe–Co pair.

In order to further support the unexpected Co\(^{II}\) spin crossover scenario in \([\text{FeCo}]\), \( ^{57}\text{Fe} \) Mössbauer studies were performed at 298 and 4.2 K. As shown in Fig. 3, a quadrupole doublet characteristic for \( \text{Fe}_{\text{LS}}^{\text{III}} \) was observed at 4.2 K (with \( \delta = 0.002 \) mm s\(^{-1}\) and \( \Delta E_Q = 2.99 \) mm s\(^{-1}\); \( \delta \) being the isomer shift and \( \Delta E_Q \) the quadrupole splitting).\(^{28}\) As the temperature was raised to 298 K, the same Fe\(^{III}\) doublet was observed with \( \delta = -0.052 \) mm s\(^{-1}\) and \( \Delta E_Q = 2.96 \) mm s\(^{-1}\), showing that the Fe electronic state remains unchanged. This Mössbauer study confirms thus the absence of a thermal intramolecular electron-transfer process occurring between Co\(^{II}\) and Fe\(^{III}\) in the solid state for \([\text{FeCo}]\).

The Co\(^{II}\) spin crossover in \([\text{FeCo}]\) is also supported by the magnetic properties (Fig. 2) that are in agreement with an \([\text{FeLS}^{\text{III}}-\text{CN}-\text{CoHS}^{\text{II}}]\) ground state below 100 K and an \([\text{FeLS}^{\text{III}}-\text{CN}-\text{CoHS}^{\text{III}}]\) excited state thermally populated above 100 K. At 360 K, the \( \chi' T \) product is not reaching a well-defined plateau but measurements at higher temperatures unfortunately led to an irreversible alteration of \([\text{FeCo}]\) induced by the loss of the interstitial solvent molecules, confirmed by thermogravimetric analysis (Fig. S8†). Nevertheless as routinely done for spin crossover systems, \( \chi' T \) vs. \( T \) data were well fitted between 25 and 360 K to an ideal solution model\(^{11}(\text{Fig. 2})\) with \( \chi' T_{\text{LS}} = 0.94(1) \) cm\(^3\) K mol\(^{-1}\) cm\(^{-1}\), \( \chi' T_{\text{HS}} = 3.19(4) \) cm\(^3\) K mol\(^{-1}\), \( T_{\text{VS}} = 228(2) \) K and \( \Delta H = 9.2(2) \) kJ mol\(^{-1}\). The \( \chi' T_{\text{LS}} \) and \( \chi' T_{\text{HS}} \) values for the low and high temperature states correspond well to the expected ones for \([\text{FeLS}^{\text{III}}-\text{CN}-\text{CoHS}^{\text{II}}]\) and \([\text{FeLS}^{\text{III}}-\text{CN}-\text{CoHS}^{\text{III}}]\) pairs respectively (Fe\(^{III}\); \( S = 1/2, g \approx 2.26; \text{Co}^{\text{II}}; S = 1/2, g \approx 2.19 \) and Co\(^{\text{III}}\); \( S = 3/2, g \approx 2.36 \)). Furthermore, it is worth noting that the enthalpy and entropy changes, \( \Delta H \) and \( \Delta S = \Delta H/T_{\text{VS}} = 40(1) \) J K\(^{-1}\) mol\(^{-1}\), are well in the range for a Co\(^{II}\) spin crossover.\(^{26}\) Decreasing the temperature below 20 K, the small increase of the \( \chi' T \) product evidences for the first time a ferromagnetic interaction, \( J \), between Fe\(^{\text{III}}\) \( (S_{\text{Fe}} = 1/2) \) and Co\(^{\text{II}}\) \( (S_{\text{Co}} = 1/2) \) centres through a cyanido bridge (see Fig. 2). This exchange coupling was estimated at +0.68(9) K from the fitting of the experimental data below 80 K (with \( g_{\text{av}} = 2.21(5) \)) on the basis of a dinuclear Heisenberg spin Hamiltonian.\(^{26}\) As a consequence of this intramolecular ferromagnetic interaction, the dinuclear \([\text{FeCo}] \) complex possesses an \( S_z = 1 \) spin ground state.

This detailed study allows us to conclude that, to the best of our knowledge, \([\text{FeCo}]\) is the only known complex exhibiting a cobalt(n) spin crossover in a heterobimetallic system.

The absence of intra-molecular electron transfer in the solid-state prompted us to study the properties of this complex in solution. Very recently, our team, as well as Oshio’s group, studied in solution the electron-transfer process of \([\text{FeCo}]\) complexes for the possibility of fine-tuning its characteristics such as \( T_{\text{VS}} \).\(^{26,21}\) Solubility and stability tests led to the conclusion that \([\text{FeCo}]\) is only significantly soluble in DMSO (dimethyl sulfoxide).\(^{11}\) Therefore DMSO solutions of \([\text{FeCo}]\) were prepared to examine whether potential electron-transfer properties could be favoured by the solvent and/or protonation. The possibility of thermal spin crossover or electron-transfer processes in DMSO solution was tested by magnetic susceptibility measurements, but only the paramagnetic \([\text{FeLS}^{\text{III}}-\text{CN}-\text{CoHS}^{\text{II}}]\) species was detected over all the experimental temperature range (Fig. S9†).

To examine the effect of protonation, UV-Vis absorption spectra were measured upon addition of trifluoroacetic acid (TFA) to a DMSO solution of \([\text{FeCo}]\). Upon acid addition, a significant spectrum modification is evidenced by a colour
change of the solution from dark green to purple (Fig. 4a). The intense absorbance at 14 800 cm$^{-1}$ before acid addition can be attributed to ligand-to-metal charge transfer (LMCT) for the \{(BBP)Fe$^{III}$CN$_3$\} part of the [FeCo] complex based on the UV-vis spectra of 1 that exhibits a very similar (in shape and intensity) LMCT band at 16 100 cm$^{-1}$ (Fig. S10$^\dagger$). As the TFA amount increases, the intensity of this \{(BBP)Fe$^{III}$CN$_3$\} LMCT band vanishes, and a new absorption band appears at 18 700 cm$^{-1}$ (Fig. 4a). It is worth mentioning here that the presence of seemingly isosbestic point at 17 390 cm$^{-1}$ might indicate that only two species are involved in the observed process. Nevertheless, the two curves representing the normalized absorbance variation at 14 800 cm$^{-1}$ and 18 700 cm$^{-1}$ upon acid addition (Fig. 4b) display an asymmetric evolution, with the crossing point not located at 0.5, therefore demonstrating the presence of more than two species in solution (vide infra).

![Fig. 4](image)

To probe if the observed process is possibly linked to an intramolecular electron transfer and spin-state changes in solution upon TFA addition, [FeCo]$^1$H NMR was measured in deuterated-DMSO (d-DMSO), before and after adding an excess of deuterated-TFA (d-TFA; 10 eq.). The untreated solution showed paramagnetic shifts of all resonances as expected for a paramagnetic [Fe$^{III}$-CN-Co$_{III}$] species. The resonance peaks could be attributed to each ligand as shown in Fig. 5, based on $^1$H NMR and $^1$H–$^1$H COSY measurements of 1, 2 and [FeCo] (Fig. S11, S12 and S13$^\dagger$). In contrast, the purple-coloured solution after treatment with d-TFA did not show any paramagnetic shifts, and all resonances could be assigned perfectly to the PY5Me$_2$ and BBP ligands in a 1 : 1 ratio (Figs. S14 and S15$^\dagger$). The NMR data unambiguously demonstrate the presence in solution of a diamagnetic species that can only be the [Fe$^{III}$,CN-Co$_{III}$] complex resulting from an electron transfer process triggered by acid addition. Therefore the characteristic absorption observed at 18 700 cm$^{-1}$ (Fig. 4) should be a metal-to-ligand charge transfer (MLCT) band$^{\text{max,ref}}$ for the Fe$^{II}$/BBP part of the fully protonated [FeCo] complex. This conclusion is well supported by the UV-vis spectrum of the fully protonated reduced form of 1 that exhibits a characteristic MLCT band at 17 800 cm$^{-1}$ (Fig. S10$^\dagger$).$^{\text{ref}}$ Those results evidence the occurrence of an intramolecular electron transfer induced by the protonation in DMSO solution of [FeCo]: upon controlled proton addition, the paramagnetic [Fe$^{III}$,CN-Co$_{III}$]...

![Fig. 5](image)
complex is progressively converted into a diamagnetic $[\text{Fe}_{\text{LS}}^\text{II}\text{CN}--\text{Co}_{\text{LS}}^\text{III}]$ species.

Additional experimental evidence on the protonation-induced electron transfer in $[\text{FeCo}]$ solutions is given by cyclic voltammetry experiments (Fig. 6). Before any acid addition to a DMSO solution of $[\text{FeCo}]$, two reversible redox waves were detected for $[\text{Fe}^{\text{II}}\text{Co}^{\text{III}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{I}}\text{Co}^{\text{II}}]$ and $[\text{Fe}^{\text{III}}\text{Co}^{\text{III}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{II}}\text{Co}^{\text{II}}]$ couples at $-0.91$ V and $0.01$ V, respectively (Fig. 6a).\[1\] After adding 0.8 eq. of acid (Fig. 6b), the former wave almost vanished, while the latter remained almost unaffected, and concomitantly, a new reversible redox wave appeared at $-0.39$ V. This result implies that the proton addition significantly affects the redox properties of the Fe site and not those of the Co part. This behaviour was confirmed by the redox properties of 1 and 2 upon acid addition (Fig. S16†). Independently of TFA addition, the Co precursor, 2, showed at $+0.13$ V a reversible one-electron redox wave corresponding to the $\text{Co}^{\text{III}}/\text{Co}^{\text{II}}$ couple. The redox properties of 2 are thus not modified by protonation as observed for the Co part of $[\text{FeCo}]$. In contrast, the redox potential of the Fe precursor, 1, is drastically changed upon proton addition: from $-1.05$ V without acid, up to $-0.46$ V for 3 eq. of TFA. Fortunately, the diprotonated paramagnetic complex, $[\text{Fe}^{\text{III}}(\text{H}_2\text{BBP})(\text{CN})_3]^{-}\text{CH}_2\text{O} (3)$ was crystallized (see Experimental section) and revealed that the two protons are positioned on the imine nitrogens of the BBP benzimidazole groups (Fig. S3†). In addition as shown by cyclic voltammetry experiments, the redox $\text{Fe}^{\text{III}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{II}}$ potential for 3 (Fig. S17†) corresponds well to the one observed for 1 after adding two equivalents of acid. The aforementioned results strongly suggest that, by adding acid to the $[\text{FeCo}]$ solution, protonation occurs rather on the BBP ligand than on the free cyanides as proposed by other groups for related systems.\[20,33\] Consequently, these nitrogen atoms in 1, and thus in $[\text{FeCo}]$, act as weak bases, and their protonation results in the positive shift of the $\text{Fe}^{\text{III}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{II}}$ redox potential. Keeping in mind that the electron transfer is governed by the redox potential difference ($\Delta\varepsilon$) between metal ion sites,\[22\] it is worth noting that $\Delta\varepsilon$ between Co and Fe metal centres is strongly reduced after the protonation, as illustrated by $[\text{FeCo}]$ as well as by 1, 2 and 3. Only at around 1 eq. of acid addition to $[\text{FeCo}]$, two new reversible redox waves appear progressively at $-0.45$ V and $-0.26$ V (Fig. 6c and d). Given the fact that the diamagnetic $[\text{Fe}^{\text{II}}\text{Co}^{\text{III}}]$ species is present in solution after the acid treatment as shown by the NMR study (Fig. 5b), the two redox waves can be straightforwardly attributed to $[\text{Fe}^{\text{II}}\text{Co}^{\text{III}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{I}}\text{Co}^{\text{II}}]$ and $[\text{Fe}^{\text{III}}\text{Co}^{\text{III}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{II}}\text{Co}^{\text{II}}]$ couples, respectively. Thus, the redox waves corresponding to the cobalt and iron sites are inverted after protonation as expected for a complex experiencing an electron transfer process. This study demonstrates that the protonation of the BBP ligand decreases $\Delta\varepsilon$ between the Fe and Co centres, and consequently, induces an electron transfer process in the final system as evidenced by the inversion of redox waves.

The reaction mechanism of the $[\text{FeCo}]$ protonation in solution was investigated from a theoretical point of view, assuming the possibility of a double protonation of this complex. Thus, three possible species are present in solution: the non-protonated $[\text{FeCo}]$, the mono-protonated $[\text{HFeCo}]^+$, and the di-protonated $[\text{H}_2\text{FeCo}]^{2+}$ complexes. The reaction scheme was described as acid-base titration, and the obtained model (see ESI†) was used to reproduce the dependence of the normalized absorbances upon acid addition. An excellent theory/experience agreement (Fig. 4b and S18†) is obtained leading to the following results: (i) $[\text{HFeCo}]^+$ is produced prior to the di-protonated one, since $[\text{HFeCo}]^+$ (estimated $pK_{\text{A2}} = 6.42$) is a weaker acid than $[\text{H}_2\text{FeCo}]^{2+}$ (estimated $pK_{\text{A1}} = 4.17$). Therefore, the introduced protons produce only $[\text{HFeCo}]^+$ until the initial $[\text{FeCo}]$ is consumed. This result explains well the cyclic voltammetry data (appearance of the two new reversible redox waves at $-0.45$ V and $-0.26$ V only around 1 eq. of acid addition to $[\text{FeCo}]$) and also why the normalized intensity of the 18 700 cm$^{-1}$ absorption band (proportional to the $[\text{H}_2\text{FeCo}]^{2+}$ concentration) stays at almost zero up to adding 1 eq. of acid (as similarly observed for the Fe precursor, Fig. S19†). (ii) The 14 800 cm$^{-1}$ absorption band can be attributed to both $[\text{FeCo}]$ and $[\text{HFeCo}]^+$ species. Consequently, $[\text{HFeCo}]$ shows the characteristic LMCT band of the Fe$^{\text{III}}$ site at a similar energy to $[\text{FeCo}]$ (as observed for 1, Fig. S19†), allowing the existence of an isosbestic point. These observations and model provide a full explanation of the UV-vis spectral changes upon protonation. Three different species are involved, explaining the asymmetric shape of the normalized absorption evolution upon proton addition. Furthermore, the diamagnetic species created by intramolecular electron transfer upon protonation is the di-protonated $[\text{H}_2\text{Fe}_{\text{LS}}^\text{II}\text{Co}_{\text{LS}}^\text{III}]^{2+}$ complex.

**Conclusion**

A new cyanido-bridged dinuclear $[(\text{BBP})\text{Fe(CN)}_3\text{Co(PV5Me}_2\text{)}_2]\cdot2.5\text{CH}_3\text{OH}$ complex was investigated both in the solid state and in solution, by structural, spectroscopic, electrochemical, and magnetic methods. In the solid state, the cobalt ion of this dinuclear complex exhibits a spin crossover involving a $[\text{Fe}_{\text{LS}}^\text{III}\text{CN}--\text{Co}_{\text{LS}}^\text{II}]$ ground state and a thermally populated
[Fe$_{5}^{III}$-CN-Co$_{5}^{II}$] state. The possible electron transfer process could be ruled out through variable temperature detailed crystallographic studies, magnetic measurements and $^{57}$Fe Mössbauer spectroscopy. To our knowledge, this compound is the only example of a heterobimetallic complex exhibiting a spin crossover on a cobalt ion. Remarkably, our studies in solution reveal important optical and magnetic changes induced by an intramolecular metal-to-metal electron transfer triggered and modulated by a controlled protonation of the complex. Therefore, the [FeCo] molecule acts as two different molecular switches depending on its physical state and external stimuli: spin crossover in solid-state induced by temperature, and intramolecular electron transfer in solution assisted by protonation. This dual property for a single complex is unprecedented and represents a new contribution to the emerging field of multifunctional tunable molecular complexes.

**Experimental section**

**Materials**

The PY5Me$_{2}$ and H$_{2}$BBP ligands were prepared as previously reported.\textsuperscript{24,25} The synthesis of [Co(PY5Me$_{2}$)(OH)$_{2}$][BF$_{4}$]$_{2}$ and [BBP]Fe(CN)$_{3}$Co(PY5Me$_{2}$)]-2.5CH$_{3}$OH were performed under an argon atmosphere using standard Schlenck and drybox techniques. Solvents for these reactions were degassed using freeze-pump-thaw method and kept under nitrogen.

**Synthesis of (Bu$_{4}$)$_{2}$[Fe(BBP)(CN)$_{3}$]-6H$_{2}$O (1)**

H$_{2}$BBP (3.13 g, 10 mmol) in 20 mL of CH$_{3}$OH was added to a methanolic solution (60 mL) of FeCl$_{3}$-6H$_{2}$O (2.70 g, 10 mmol). The resulting red solution was refluxed for 1 h followed by addition of NaCN (3.00 mg, 60 mmol) in 20 mL of water. The mixture was refluxed for further 8 h during which time the solution changed to dark blue. The solvent was then removed on a rotary evaporator, the resulting blue solid was extracted with dry methanol. On addition of ether the solution formed a blue powder. Yield: 4.12 g (71%). To an aqueous solution (30 mL) of this blue powder (2.95 g, 5 mmol) was added tetrabutylammonium bromide (3.22 g, 10 mmol) in water (20 mL). The instantaneous blue precipitate was collected by filtration, washed with water and air-dried. The polycrystalline product was dissolved in a mixture of methanol and water, and sheet-like crystals of intense blue colour were obtained by slow evaporation. Yield: 4.37 g (89%); FT-IR (ATR, cm$^{-1}$): 2959 (m), 2872 (m), 2109 (s), 1648 (w), 1614 (w), 1574 (w), 1451 (m), 1352 (m), 1233 (m), 1271 (m), 1146 (w), 1075 (w), 1029 (w), 998 (w), 917 (w), 865 (w), 747 (s), 642 (w); elemental analysis calc. for C$_{33}$H$_{38}$FeN$_{37}$O$_{4}$: C 57.0, H 3.3, N 24.2%; found: C 56.8, H 3.0, N 24.2%.

**Synthesis of [Co(PY5Me$_{2}$)(OH)$_{2}$][BF$_{4}$]$_{2}$ (2)**

To an acetonitrile solution (5 mL) of PY5Me$_{2}$ (200 mg, 0.45 mmol) was added a methanolic solution (5 mL) of Co(BF$_{4}$)$_{2}$-6H$_{2}$O (150 mg, 0.45 mmol). The pale orange coloured solution was stirred for 3 h, and then filtrated. The slow diffusion of ether vapour afforded yellow crystals. Yield 0.27 g (86%); FT-IR (ATR, cm$^{-1}$): 3406 (m), 1644 (w), 1594 (s), 1470 (w), 1466 (m), 1454 (m), 1440 (m), 1411 (w), 1389 (w), 1067 (s), 1016 (s), 995 (s), 865 (w), 843 (w), 762 (m), 628 (m), 576 (w); elemental analysis calc. for C$_{52}$H$_{44}$CoFeN$_{13}$O$_{3}$: C 61.6, H 4.4, N 17.9; found: C 61.5, H 4.4, N 17.8%.

**Synthesis of [(BBP)Fe(CN)$_{3}$Co(PY5Me$_{2}$)]-2.5CH$_{3}$OH ([FeCo])**

A methanolic solution (5 mL) of I (71 mg, 0.065 mmol) was layered with an acetonitrile solution (5 mL) of 2 (47 mg, 0.065 mmol) in a tube of 2 × 12 cm. Square-like single crystals suitable for X-ray diffraction were obtained after 1 week. Yield 51 mg (75%); FT-IR (ATR, cm$^{-1}$): 3337 (br), 2161 (w), 2137 (m), 2118 (m), 1642 (w), 1592 (m), 1507 (w), 1451 (m), 1439 (m), 1348 (m), 1320 (m), 1265 (m), 1057 (m), 1022 (s), 916 (m), 861 (m), 817 (m), 745 (s), 646 (m); elemental analysis calc. for C$_{52}$H$_{44}$CoFeN$_{13}$O$_{3}$: C 61.6, H 4.4, N 17.9; found: C 61.5, H 4.4, N 17.8%.

**Physical measurements**

**Elemental analysis.** Elemental analysis was performed on a Thermo Fischer Flash EA 1112 equipment.

**FT-IR spectra.** FT-IR spectra were recorded in the range 400-4000 cm$^{-1}$ on a Thermal Scientific Nicolet 6700 ATR (attenuated total reflection) spectrometer equipped with a smart iTR diamond window.

**Single crystal X-ray.** Single crystal X-ray data were collected on single crystals mounted in Paratone-N oil on a 50 μm MicroMounts$^{	ext{TM}}$ rod. The crystallographic data were collected with a Bruker APEX II diffractometer, equipped with a graphite monochromator centred on the path of Mo K$_{α}$. The program SAINT was used to integrate the data, which was thereafter corrected for absorption using SADABS.\textsuperscript{29} All structures were solved by direct methods and refined by a full-matrix least-squares method on $F^2$ using SHELXL97.\textsuperscript{24} Hydrogen atoms were placed at calculated positions using suitable riding models.
except those belonging to the coordinated water molecule in compound 2 and those connected to the nitrogen atoms in compound 3. The latter were found in the difference Fourier maps, and refined using DFIX constraints in compound 3. All hydrogen atoms were refined using isotropic displacement parameters derived from their parent atoms. Non-hydrogen atoms were refined with anisotropic displacement parameters.

**Magnetic susceptibility measurements.** Magnetic susceptibility measurements were carried out on a Quantum Design SQUID magnetometer MPMS-XL operating between 1.8 and 400 K for applied dc fields ranging from −70 kOe to 70 kOe. An M vs. H measurement was performed at 100 K to confirm the absence of ferromagnetic impurities. Experimental data were corrected for the sample holder and for the diamagnetic contribution of the sample.

**Mössbauer measurements.** Mössbauer measurements were performed using a constant acceleration HALDER-type spectrometer with a room temperature $^{57}$Co/Rh source in transmission geometry. The polycrystalline absorber containing about 10 mg cm$^{-2}$ of iron was used to avoid experimental broadening of the peaks. The spectra were recorded at 293 and 4.2 K using a variable temperature cryostat. The velocity was calibrated using pure iron metal as the standard material. The refinement of Mössbauer spectra has been done assuming a distribution of hyperfine fields. It is worth mentioning that the small difference on the isomer shift depending on the temperature is due to the relativistic second order Doppler shift.

**Thermogravimetric analysis.** The thermogravimetric analysis (TGA) was carried out between 298 and 900 K at 5 K min$^{-1}$ in a nitrogen atmosphere using a thermogravimetric analyser Setaram TAG 16.

**Powder X-ray diffraction.** Powder X-ray diffraction patterns were recorded at 298 K on a PANalytical X’pert MPD Bragg–Brentano $\theta-\theta$ geometry diffractometer equipped with a secondary monochromator over an angular range of 2$\theta = 8–30$$^\circ$. The Cu K$_\alpha$ radiation was generated at 40 kV and 40 mA. The samples were put on sample holders made of silicon and flattened with a piece of glass.

**UV-vis spectra.** UV-vis spectra were collected between 400 and 900 nm using a UNICAM UV-100 Spectrophotometer.

**NMR spectra.** NMR spectra were obtained with JEOL JMN-ECS 400 system.

**Cyclic voltammetry measurements.** Cyclic voltammetry measurements were carried out in a standard one-compartment cell under N$_2$, equipped with platinum wires for counter/working electrodes and silver wire for reference electrode using a CHI 760e potentiostat. The measurements were performed in dimethylsulfoxide (for 1, 3 and [FeCo]) and in acetonitrile (for 2) with 0.1 M tetrabutylammonium hexafluorophosphate ([Bu$_4$N$^+$][PF$_6$$^-]$) as the supporting electrolyte.

**Spectroelectrochemical measurements.** Spectroelectrochemical measurements were carried out in an OTTLE cell (purchased from the University of Reading, UK)$^{15}$ with CaF$_2$ windows separated by a 200 $\mu$M PE spacer embedding Pt grids as working and counter electrodes and an Ag/AgCl wire as a pseudoreference electrode, using a Metrohm PGSTAT101 potentiostat. Spectra were collected between 400 and 1000 nm using a Varian Cary 5 spectrophotometer. Measurements were performed in identical conditions (solvent, electrolyte type and concentration). Electrolyses were performed at fixed potential, monitoring the decrease of the current, before spectra acquisition.

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**Notes and references**

† The following equation deduced from the ideal model$^{16}$ was used to fit the cross-over behaviour observed by magnetic measurements, with $X$ being the $x^T$ product, $X_{LS}$ and $X_{HS}$ being the $x^T$ products for low-spin and high-spin species, respectively, $\Delta H$ being the enthalpy change associated to the cross-over phenomenon and $R$ being the ideal gas constant.

§ The theoretical susceptibility deduced from the Heisenberg dinuclear isotropic $S = 1/2$ spin Hamiltonian ($H = -2J_s\sigma_S\sigma_S$) was calculated from the van Vleck equation in the weak field approximation.

$X = X_{LS} + \frac{X_{HS} - X_{LS}}{1 + \exp\left(\frac{\Delta H}{k_B T} \left(\frac{1}{T} - \frac{1}{T_{1/2}}\right)\right)}$

¶ Even if the nitrogen atom of the Fe(n) precursor cyanide is likely a better donor group to the Co(n) ion than the oxygen atom of DMSO, the stability of the neutral [FeCo] in DMSO solutions was checked by combined techniques: UV-vis spectroscopy, cyclic voltammetry and NMR. The UV-vis measurements (Figs. 4, S10 and S11) show that the LMCT band for the [BBP][FeFe(CN)$_3$]$_2$ part of [FeCo] is clearly shifted by about 1300 cm$^{-1}$, suggesting the absence of free [BBP]FeFe(CN)$_3$]$_2$ precursor in DMSO solution and its full coordination. The Fe$^{II}$/Fe$^{III}$ redox potential observed for the [BBP][FeFe(CN)$_3$]$_2$ precursor at $-1.09$ V (Fig. S16) is shifted significantly by $+0.18$ V for the [FeCo] complex (Fig. 6). Similar effects upon coordination have already seen in several dinuclear Co/Fe cyanido-bridged complexes reported by Bernhardt et al.$^{19,20}$ that show positive shifts between +0.17 and +0.20 V in perfect agreement with the present results for [FeCo]. The NMR spectrum shown in Fig. 5a for a DMSO solution of the [FeCo] complex is completely different from a simple superposition of the NMR spectra of the precursors in DMSO shown in Fig. S11.$^†$ Therefore, the dinuclear [FeCo] complex is stable in DMSO solution without significant dissociation at room temperature.
