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Can a Daoist Sage Have Close Relationships with Other Human Beings?

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CAN A DAOIST SAGE HAVE CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER HUMAN BEINGS?

– Joanna Iwanowska –

Abstract. This paper explores the compatibility between the Daoist art of emptying one's heart-mind (which is the key element of the identity of a Daoist sage) and the art of creating close relationships. The fact that a Daoist sage is characterized by an empty heart-mind makes him somewhat different from an average human being: since a full heart-mind is characteristic of the human condition, the sage transcends what makes us human. This could alienate him from others and make him incapable of developing close relationships. The research goal of this paper is to investigate whether – in spite of being an unusual human being – a Daoist sage has the abilities necessary for creating close bonds with others.

Keywords: ethics, Daoism, sage, heart-mind, emptiness, Daoist identity, close relationships.

Introduction

The fact that a Daoist sage is characterized by an empty heart-mind and thus transcends the human condition makes him¹ different from an average human being. The question that I would like to explore is whether being different in this way makes it impossible for the sage to develop close relationships with other human beings.

I shall start my analysis by shedding some light on the Chinese concept of the heart-mind. After that, I will go on to examine the art of emptying the heart-mind, which constitutes the core and constant practice of a Daoist sage and makes him transcend the human condition. This will bring me to investigating the notion of *zhi*,² the knowing consciousness, since the empty heart-mind is characterized by

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¹ I have chosen to talk about a Daoist sage using the pronoun 'he.' This is not to say that a Daoist sage cannot be of any other gender [see, for example, the story about Lady Ju: Zhuangzi (2009): Chapter Six 6:34-6:38.] However, all the textual examples that I have used in this paper are of sage-like men, and this is the reason behind my choice of the pronoun 'he.'

² Throughout this paper, Chinese words are rendered according to the *pinyin* system.

being free from *zhi*. I will also take a moment to focus on whether having an empty heart-mind – which is free from emotions – implies being emotionless. In the middle of the paper, I shall provide a definition of a close relationship, and this will allow me to analyze whether being devoted to the cultivation of an empty heart-mind might be compatible with developing close relationships. First, I will investigate whether a Daoist sage knows how to voice and respect consent, and how to be reciprocal. I will also research whether the sage is capable of non-instrumental treatment of others, as well as responsibility-sharing, trust-giving and trust-receiving. Finally, I will consider the likelihood of the sage having the ability to display the aforementioned close-relationship competences in a persistent way.

In my research, I have chosen to focus on one Daoist text only, namely the *Zhuangzi*. Most of the time I shall be using Brook Ziporyn's translation (2009), but sometimes I will also consult James Legge's translation (1891) to complement that of Ziporyn. As far as the notion of close relationships is concerned, my analysis is based on the discourse of various Western philosophers.

The concept of the heart-mind, *xīn*

In Chinese there is one and the same word – *xīn* – signifying both 'heart' and 'mind',³ and therefore a translation of *xīn* into English has been a topic of scholarly debate. Some scholars have chosen to respect the fact that *xīn* points to two different English words by fusing the words 'heart' and 'mind' into one word 'heart-mind',⁴ others have chosen to sometimes translate *xīn* as 'heart' and sometimes as 'mind', depending on the context.⁵ In this paper, I have decided in favor of the former strategy since I believe that the heart-mind cluster is inseparable and that dissecting it would impoverish and somewhat distort the original Chinese concept.

So, what is a heart-mind and how does it function? In the early Daoist thought, the heart-mind was considered to be the central part of the human body, "the unifying element of the organism."⁶ Metaphorically speaking, it can be said that the heart-mind is the "ruler" of the whole body and therefore that the functioning of the heart-mind influences the functioning of the whole human being.⁷

³ Möller (2006a): 30; Mair (1994): 378; Geaney (2012): 12; Cline (2008): 338.

⁴ Also written as 'heart/mind' or 'heart(mind).'

⁵ Mair (2014).

⁶ Möller (2006a): 30.

⁷ *Ibidem*; Robinet (1997): 14.

At the core of the heart-mind of every human being there is an authentic self.⁸ The authentic self is intimately connected with virtue (*de*), which is a gift people receive from Heaven at birth.⁹ But the heart-mind is also the seat of all mental activity; it is the “location of consciousness.”¹⁰ With time and *via* the contact with the outside world (learning a language, learning social norms, going through traumatic experiences, etc.¹¹), the human heart-mind becomes filled – like a container¹² – with *zhi*, translated as ‘knowing consciousness,’ ‘understanding consciousness,’ ‘wisdom,’ ‘intellect.’¹³ Not knowing how to use *zhi* selectively – turn it on when necessary, but also turn it off at other times¹⁴ – a human being comes to depend on *zhi* and identify with it completely.¹⁵ When unstopped in its growth, *zhi* continues to produce multiple intellectual layers atop the true self; David Machek describes these layers as “derivative” and “inauthentic,” and says that they include “all that arises from and is sustained by attachment to external things.”¹⁶ The accumulated layers form a multi-level illusory sense of self.¹⁷ When this false sense of self is allowed to develop, it takes over the heart-mind of a given person, and “[a]ll actions that are motivated by these inauthentic layers oppress and harm one’s spiritual core.”¹⁸ This means that the thoughts, actions, and speech of a person are no longer the reflection of their true self, but become governed by the false sense of self.¹⁹ A good illustration of such consequences of experiencing the outside world can be found in the *Zhuangzi* in the words addressed to a person who witnesses the struggle of other people: “Your eyes will be dazzled by the struggle, your counte-

⁸ Machek (2015b): 22; Slingerland (2003): 176.

⁹ Slingerland (2003): 189–190.

¹⁰ Möller (2006b): 38.

¹¹ Blakeley (2008): 320.

¹² For an exhaustive discussion of the heart-mind as a container in the *Zhuangzi* – but also in the early Chinese thought in general – see, for example, Slingerland (2003).

¹³ Ziporyn (2009): 219–220.

¹⁴ Zhuangzi (2009): Chapter Four 4:1–4:12, but in particular 4:9–4:10 (“You have learned the wisdom of being wise, but not yet the wisdom of being free of wisdom.” As noted by the translator, *zhi* appears four times in this sentence.)

¹⁵ In Chapter Five it is shown that a Daoist sage has a radically different attitude towards *zhi* than an average human being. While an average human being identifies with *zhi*, for the sage “understanding [*zhi*] is merely a bastard son.” See Zhuangzi (2009): Chapter Five 5:20.

¹⁶ Machek (2015b): 22.

¹⁷ Wang (2000): 354.

¹⁸ Machek (2015b): 22. See also Slingerland (2003): 185.

¹⁹ Wang (2000): 353.

nance flattened by it, your mouth busied with it, your face expressive of it – and finally your heart and mind will be completely made of it!”²⁰

As emphasized by L.K. Chen and Hiu Chuk Winnie Sung, the false sense of self takes up all the space within the heart-mind, and the vital energy – *qi* – can no longer flow in and nourish the heart-mind; with the flow of the vital energy thus blocked, a human being is blocked from the contact with Dao. In contrast, an empty heart-mind has space for the vital energy to pour in, and a high concentration of vital energies “gives rise to an enlightened knowledge of Dao.”²¹

The fasting of the heart-mind

For a Daoist sage, being ethical means respecting the order and harmony of the world as it is by itself; this means being attuned to the natural course of all things and not causing disturbance.²² In order to “follow the Way (*dao*) and the ‘own course’ (*ziran*)”²³ of the world, one needs the full and unblocked contact with Dao, and this can only be ensured by having an empty heart-mind.²⁴ Thus, the goal of a Daoist sage is this kind of inner void (*wu*). The question is how to achieve and cultivate such a state within oneself. In the *Zhuangzi*, a straightforward answer to this question is given in Chapter Four where the art of emptying the heart-mind is referred to metaphorically as “fasting”:

Confucius said, ‘...You are still taking your [heart-]mind [*xin*] as your instructor.’

Yan Hui said, ‘I have nothing more. What then should I do?’

Confucius said, ‘You must fast! ...’

Yan Hui said, ‘What is the fasting of the [heart-]mind?’

Confucius said, ‘If you merge all your intention into a singularity, you will come to hear with the [heart-]mind rather than with the ears. Further, you will come to hear with the vital energy [*qi*] rather than with the [heart-]mind. For the ears are halted at what they hear. The [heart-]mind is halted at whatever verifies its preconceptions. But the vital energy is emptiness, a waiting for the presence of beings. The Course alone is what gathers in this emptiness [*wu*]. And it is this

²⁰ Zhuangzi (2009): Chapter Four 4:4.

²¹ Chen, Sung (2015): 258. See also Möller (2006b): 38-40. Möller underlines that non-presence/emptiness (*wu*) in the heart-mind (and in the cosmos in general) is the necessary condition for achieving a high concentration of *qi*, which stands for presence (*you*); the non-presence makes room for the presence. For the discussion of the importance of the unblocked flow of *qi* for human well-being, see also Geaney (2012): 9-10, 12.

²² Möller (2006a): 116-118; Lee (2014): 44-45.

²³ Möller (2006a): 117 (italics mine).

²⁴ Ibidem: 119-120; Møllgaard (2007): 108; Lee (2014): 44-45.

emptiness that is the fasting of the [heart-]mind... Allow your ears and eyes to open inward and thereby place yourself beyond your [heart-]mind's understanding consciousness [*zhi*].²⁵

According to the quoted fragment, the formula for emptying one's heart-mind goes as follows: first, one has to go beyond the level of sense perception – hearing with the ears, etc. – onto the level of the heart-mind – hearing with the heart-mind – where *zhi* is dominant; second, one has to go beyond *zhi* and move onto the level of *qi* – hearing with the vital energy. Freeing oneself from *zhi* and hearing with *qi* is equal to attaining an empty heart-mind, because “the vital energy is an emptiness.”²⁶ On this last level, one does not perceive with the senses, nor does one exercise the functions of the heart-mind connected with *zhi*; for the person who has attained the state of an empty heart-mind, everything and everyone (including oneself) constitute one presence of beings, one Dao.²⁷ While the senses and the *zhi*-governed heart-mind both have their perceptual limitations, an empty heart-mind (through which *qi* flows freely) is not perceptually halted at anything. Because Dao is the only thing that gathers in the void (*wu*), the contact with Dao through *qi* is straightforward and full, without obstacles or limitations.

A heart-mind which is free from *zhi*, the knowing consciousness

The last section has allowed us to grasp the mechanics of the metaphorical fasting; however, this is not yet enough to fully comprehend the concept of an empty heart-mind. One question remains unanswered: what is it precisely that an empty heart-mind is empty of? If an empty heart-mind is free from *zhi*, it is crucial to better understand what *zhi* stands for.

The state of the internal void (*wu*) is connected with being at one with everything and everybody.²⁸ *A contrario*, the state in which the heart-mind is not empty is a state in which one makes differentiations between things, classifying and evaluating them as different and separate from oneself and from one another.²⁹ For making differentiations, one needs to know the criteria by which to distinguish between things. In other words, what one needs is the knowledge of names

²⁵ Zhuangzi (2009): Chapter Four 4:8, 4:11.

²⁶ Ibidem: Chapter Four 4:8.

²⁷ Chan (1973): 186; Misiuna (2004): 173.

²⁸ Zhuangzi (2009): Chapter Two 2:31, Chapter Seven 7:0.

²⁹ Wang (2000): 353–354.

and forms.³⁰ Therefore, an empty heart-mind shall, first of all, be empty of this kind of knowledge and, thus, empty of differentiations and evaluations.³¹ As already mentioned above, a person with an empty heart-mind shall see all things, including oneself, simply as *beings*, which are all present with one presence, one Dao. This is visible in the Zhuangzian story about the carpenter and the great tree. In this story, the tree serves as an example of a being with an empty heart-mind, and it addresses the carpenter in the following words: “you and I are both beings – is either of us in a position to classify and evaluate the other?”³²

The less one differentiates between things by their name and form, the less exclusivity and unavailability and, thus, the less desire one produces.³³ Since the Daoist sage does not see anything as separate from himself, he has no reason to desire anything. Therefore, an empty heart-mind of the sage shall also be empty of desire.³⁴ For example, unlike an average human being, the sage does not desire to have one fixed course of action; at one with everything that surrounds him, he can go on by resonating and harmonizing with his surroundings.³⁵ “For to him each thing is just so, each thing is right, and so he enfolds them all within himself affirming the rightness of each.”³⁶ Thus, the sage is said not to have a fixed system of right and wrong,³⁷ but to go “by the rightness of the present ‘this’.”³⁸

From what has been said so far in this section, *zhi*, the knowing consciousness, emerges as being constructed from such knowledge that serves as a classifying, evaluating, and naming tool – a tool which gives rise to a fixed course of action, a fixed system of right and wrong, and desires. Since in the knowledge-based

³⁰ Dull (2012): 226–227; Geaney (2012): 13. Notice that the knowledge of names and forms is a different kind of knowledge than the knowledge of Dao which is nameless and formless. For a more detailed discussion of this difference (but in the context of Laozi), see Yijie (2015): 156.

³¹ Slingerland (2003): 175, 186, 188; Blakeley (2008): 318. An interesting passage exemplifying the sage’s staying clear of this sort of knowledge can be found in Zhuangzi (2009): Chapter Two 2:38.

³² Zhuangzi (2009): Chapter Four 4:17.

³³ Wang (2000): 355.

³⁴ Lenehan (2013): 340; Yijie (2003): 277, 279. That the sage is without desires and passions is discussed explicitly in Chapter Five of the *Zhuangzi*. However, in order to see that, one has to consult a different translation than that of Ziporyn. What Ziporyn translates as “the characteristic human inclinations” that the sage is empty of, Legge translates as “passions [meaning excessive emotions] and desires of men”: “Being without the passions and desires of men, their approvings and disapprovings are not to be found in him [the sage].” See Zhuangzi (1891): Chapter Five (entitled *The Seal of Virtue Complete*), section 5. Section 6 has a further discussion on being without passions and desires. For Ziporyn’s version, see Zhuangzi (2009): Chapter Five 5:21.

³⁵ Zhuangzi (2009): Chapter Two 2:44–2:45.

³⁶ *Ibidem*: Chapter Two 2:40.

³⁷ *Ibidem*: Chapter Two 2:15–2:24, 2:33.

³⁸ *Ibidem*: Chapter Two 2:22, 2:32.

process of differentiation one classifies, evaluates, as well as names oneself, another result of the functioning of *zhi* is a false sense of self, referred to in the *Zhuangzi* as a “fixed identity.”³⁹ Having a fixed identity is intimately tied with having a name. The sage stays clear of having a fixed identity (a false sense of self), and this is very often expressed *via* describing him as “nameless”.⁴⁰ “There is something unnamable about him that allows all creatures to delight in themselves.”⁴¹

To the question as to why a sage would have no need for a fixed identity, the answer is simple: because he is “unsplit,”⁴² meaning that he is neither split within himself, nor split from the world that surrounds him. As *Zhuangzi* explains, a person who is unsplit has no need for any kind of “glue”⁴³ that would make him whole and integral: “The sage makes no plans, so what use would he have for understanding [*zhi*]? He is unsplit, so what use would he have for glue?”⁴⁴ One, whole, and integral is what the sage already is, just so.

The question of emotions

The same way that the sage does not identify with a name, or with any fixed evaluations, beliefs, bias,⁴⁵ he does not create identity (a self) from the emotions that might happen to come upon him. However, it is not really the case that a Daoist sage is emotionless;⁴⁶ it is rather that he does not add anything (i.e., a word, a thought, an action) to make a given emotion amplify and, thus, exceed its natural boundaries.⁴⁷ Such excessive emotions (*qing*) have traditionally been translated as ‘passions’,⁴⁸ but I think they could simply be referred to as ‘excessive emotions.’ A good illustration of the sage’s formula for well-being can be found in the following passage in the *Zhuangzi*:

³⁹ Ibidem: Chapter One 1:7.

⁴⁰ Ibidem: Chapter Seven 7:3. But also Chapter One 1:7.

⁴¹ Ibidem: Chapter Seven 7.5.

⁴² Ibidem: Chapter Five 5:20.

⁴³ Ibidem.

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵ Ibidem: Chapter Seven 7:3.

⁴⁶ Möller (2006a): 119; Machek (2015a): 522–523; Lenehan (2013): 343, 352; Chong (2010): 37–38; Yijie (2003): 277–279; Qian (1998): 390.

⁴⁷ Machek (2015a): 531–532; Lenehan (2013): 344–345.

⁴⁸ *Zhuangzi* (1891); but also Machek (2015a): 529. For a discussion of many different ideas of how to translate *qing* and some controversy around it, see Chong (2010).

What I call being free of them [excessive emotions (*qing*)] means not allowing likes or dislikes to damage you internally, instead making it your constant practice to follow along with the way each thing is of itself..., without trying to add anything to the process of life.⁴⁹

The sage consciously restrains himself from making any such additions that would lead to prolonging the life span of an emotion. As a result, emotions remain spontaneous,⁵⁰ genuine,⁵¹ and harmless⁵² – they come and go freely, like changes in the weather or the seasons of the year,⁵³ and they never transform into anything excessive and harmful. Thus, emotions are never artificially⁵⁴ solidified into a fixed identity. The sage is free from emotions in the sense that they leave no residue in his heart-mind, they do not take up the space within, and thus they do not block the flow of *qi* and the sage's unity with Dao.⁵⁵ By cultivating the void (*wu*) of the heart-mind, the sage ensures that he is never harmed by emotions.

A Daoist identity

If a Daoist sage's identity is not constructed the way a typical human being's identity is constructed, then who is a Daoist sage? Does such a being even have an identity, and can we still call it human identity? The *Zhuangzi* interpreters agree that a Daoist sage transcends the human condition,⁵⁶ whatever tendencies are characteristic of the human heart-mind, the sage liberates himself from them. In fact, the art of emptying the heart-mind that constitutes the core and constant practice of the Daoist sage means "fasting away the 'essence' of what makes us human,"⁵⁷ including thoughts, knowledge, judgments, morality, language, desires, emotions. By avoiding a fixed identity that would be constructed of these elements, a Daoist sage can no longer be said to have a human identity. If he can be considered to have an identity, it will be characterized by the core and constant

⁴⁹ Zhuangzi (2009): Chapter Five 5:22–5.23.

⁵⁰ Yijie (2003): 277, Machek (2015a): 535.

⁵¹ Machek (2015a): 541.

⁵² Lenehan (2013): 342, 345.

⁵³ Machek (2015a): 535, Wang (2000): 353.

⁵⁴ I say 'artificially solidified' because the nature of emotions is that they are ever changing [Wang (2000): 353]. Using them as building blocks of a fixed construct is, therefore, trying to work against their nature and not letting them be what they are.

⁵⁵ Lenehan (2013): 343; Cline (2008): 339.

⁵⁶ See, for example, Møllgaard (2007): 20, 106; Slingerland (2003): 175; Liu (2015): 204–205.

⁵⁷ Slingerland (2003): 175.

practice of emptying the heart-mind. The empty heart-mind is the sage's identity. By being one with the emptiness, the sage is one with Dao, and this is a Daoist identity: it is an identity of emptiness (*wu*) that makes room for the presence (*you*) of all things and complements it.⁵⁸ The question that I want to delve into in the rest of this paper is the following: can such an unusual human being who no longer has a human identity develop close relationships with other human beings?

Close relationships

Although many philosophers have addressed the topic of interpersonal proximity to some extent, a more thorough definition of close relationships seems to be lacking. For that reason, in a different paper, I have attempted to put together various bits and pieces of the philosophical discourse of many authors in order to try to create a definition of close relationships that would be comprehensive and thorough. This definition has been presented in the form of a portrayal of an ideal close other and the competences such a person should display in order to be able to construct close relationships with other people.⁵⁹

Let me begin the presentation of these competences with an observation that an individual can be forced to maintain some kind of a relationship with another person, but cannot be forced to have a close relationship with that person. Interpersonal closeness can only develop consensually;⁶⁰ it can grow if and only if the persons involved agree to a further dose of proximity between them. Therefore, (1) an individual who is capable of forming close relationships with others will know how to voice their own consent or the lack of it, and they will also know how to respect the other person's consent or the lack of it. Moreover, the fact that interpersonal proximity can grow only through a series of consensual choices implies that a close relationship is – of necessity – reciprocal. Thus, (2) a person competent in forming close relationships will have the ability to reciprocate.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Möller (2006a): 120–127, 129–137.

⁵⁹ The current section constitutes a succinct summary of a definition of close relationships discussed at length in Iwanowska (2016).

⁶⁰ See, for example, Heyman (2008): 152.

⁶¹ The importance of reciprocity as one of the constitutive elements of a close relationship has been stressed by such philosophers as Aristotle and Immanuel Kant (both talking about reciprocity in a close friendship), Simone de Beauvoir and Julie K. Ward (who stresses the importance of reciprocity in close relationships in de Beauvoir's philosophy), Kyla Ebels-Duggan (talking about reciprocity in a love-based close relationship between adults), Frank Jackson (talking about *mutual* trust, affection, and respect in close relationships). See Aristotle (2011): 1155b–1156a; Kant (1991): 261 §46 [469–470]; Beauvoir (2012a): 395–396; Ward (2006): 146–162; Ebels-Duggan (2008): 162–170; Jackson (1991): 474–475.

Furthermore, being watchful and respectful of a person's consent is closely linked to treating that person as a subject, not an object which is meant to bend to another's will. Therefore, (3) an ideal close other will also know how to treat the close person non-instrumentally.⁶²

Apart from having these competences, a person who can develop close relationships shall (4) have the ability to place their trust in the close other and also – in the spirit of reciprocity – welcome the close person's trust.⁶³ It is worth underlining that since trust can be unwelcome,⁶⁴ both trust-giving and trust-receiving must happen consensually – just as nobody can be forced to put trust in another person, also nobody should be coerced to welcome trust that another person wants to place in them. It is of utmost importance to stress this in the case of close-relationships, because the kind of trust that is placed in one another by the close others is related to high-responsibility tasks. Drawing on the thought of Richard Holton,⁶⁵ I claim that saying "I trust my close other" does not entail that I entrust my close other with everything; instead, I trust them to perform certain specific high-responsibility tasks that they are competent to perform.⁶⁶ To be precise, the proximity between us allows me to entrust my close other with being inter-responsible for my moral agency and my self-narrative truth. An ideal close other shall (5) be capable of such (consensual⁶⁷) responsibility-sharing: (5a) this person will help me guard the truthfulness of my self-narrative and allow me to provide them with similar assistance;⁶⁸ also, (5b) they will be open to being inter-responsible for the kind of moral agent I become, and they will welcome my inter-responsibility for their moral agency in return.⁶⁹

⁶² The examples of philosophers who stressed non-instrumental treatment as an important element of interpersonal proximity include Aristotle (2011): 1157b, 1159a, 1166b; Kant (1991): 262 §46 [470]; Beauvoir (2012b): 636-640; Nozick (1999): 168; Soble (1997): 355-357; Velleman (1999): 354-361.

⁶³ Hugh LaFollete identifies trust as a constitutive element of close relationships. See LaFollete (1996): 210.

⁶⁴ Simpson (2012): 563; Hawley (2014): 1, 11.

⁶⁵ Holton says that "[e]ven when you do trust a person, you need not trust them in every way. Trust is a three-place relation: one person trusts another to do certain things. You can trust a person to do some things without trusting them to do others." See Holton (1994): 66. Originally trust is defined as a three-place relation by Annette Baier. See Baier (1986): 234.

⁶⁶ The connection between trust and competence is stressed by Katherine Hawley. See Hawley (2014): 1.

⁶⁷ For a relevant discussion concerning the ethical and legal unacceptability of forcing another person to share such an intimate kind of responsibility as the one I describe, see Heyman (2008): 151-152.

⁶⁸ Matthews, Kennett (2012).

⁶⁹ Plato (2004): 479 D – 480 D, 508 B D, 509 B C; Williams (2013): 355-357.

Finally, it should be explained that the level of responsibility connected with close relationships is very high not merely because the stakes are high (a person's moral agency and their self-narrative), but also because this kind of responsibility is constant, and not a one time or an *ad hoc* task. The criterion of persistence is an Aristotelian one. Aristotle says that the way to establish trust which is characteristic of close relationships is to test a person "over a long time."⁷⁰ Thus, we can deduce that (6) for a person to be perceived as a trustworthy close other, this person has to have the ability to persist in displaying the close-relationship competences.

To finish, let me stress that the aforementioned competences compose a set, and it is the whole set of these competences that a person should have in order to be able to form close relationships. To understand why, consider, for example, that a relationship can be reciprocal without being close (a relationship between business partners, for instance); it follows that being competent *only* in reciprocating is not enough to be able to form close relationships. Also, there are relationships which involve trust-giving and trust-receiving but, at the same time, require distance and detachment, like the patient-doctor relationship. These two examples show that, when it comes to drawing a portrait of an ideal close other, the above-mentioned competences should not be viewed in isolation, but as composing a set of competences that a person should possess.

This normative portrait of an ideal close other is drawn on the basis of the discourse of Western philosophers; whether or not a Daoist sage might fit the criteria of a competent close other from this perspective shall now be considered.

The Daoist sage *versus* the close-relationship competences

The sections that follow shall be devoted to an analysis of certain relevant extracts from the *Zhuangzi*. In my analysis, I shall *not* focus on one particular sage only. Instead, I will be investigating the *figure* of a sage, embodied by different sages or sages-to-be in the *Zhuangzi*. Also, I do not aim to establish whether any particular sage *actually is* in a close relationship, as this would require researching not only the given sage, but all persons involved in a relationship; it would also require investigating one particular relationship over a long period of time. Instead, I would like to establish whether the *figure* of a sage – as presented in the *Zhuangzi* – displays close-relationship competences. Establishing this would mean that it is possible for a Daoist sage to develop and maintain close relationships

⁷⁰ Aristotle (2011): 1157a. Aristotle talks about trust in a close friendship.

with other human beings, irrespective of whether he has found a companion with whom such a relationship can actually be developed.

For my analysis, I have used two examples of the *Zhuangzi* scenes that happen between friends,⁷¹ but also an example of a situation that takes place between a master and his apprentice. Additionally, I have included an example of the sage's attitude towards other beings in general, including non-human beings.

(1) Consensuality and (2) reciprocity

Starting with consensuality, there are two stories in Chapter Six of the *Zhuangzi*, which indicate that – when constructing interpersonal closeness – the figure of the sage is characterized with the ability to voice their own consent and to be watchful of the other person's consent or the lack of it. The first story is about the beginning of the relationship between the four sagely men: Ziji, Ziyu, Zili, and Zilai. In the beginning of the story, one of the men invites the other three to become closer to him in the following way: “Who can see nothingness as his own head, life as his spine, and death as his own ass? Who knows the single body formed by life and death, existence and nonexistence? I will be his friend!”⁷² At such an invitation all “four looked at one another and laughed, feeling complete concord, and became friends.”⁷³ The second story introduces the reader to three other sagely men: Zisanghu, Mengzifan, and Ziqinzhong. Like in the previous story, there is an invitation to mutual proximity which starts with these words: “Who can be together in their very not being together, do things for one another by not doing things for one another?”⁷⁴ Again the reaction of all three men is to look at one another and burst out laughing, “feeling complete concord,”⁷⁵ and – through this concord about mutual proximity – they become friends. In both friendship stories, the decision to become closer to one another is made together; there is concord regarding the interpersonal closeness that the men enter into: a question about consent is asked and the consent to further proximity is willingly given.

Analyzing these two interactions that mark the beginning of close friendships, we can also see that the figure of the sage (incarnated by the protagonists of the two stories) is capable of reciprocity: in each situation there is initiative regarding the potentiality of creating friendly proximity, and in each of these situations the initiative is met with reciprocity through a non-verbal expression of consent.

⁷¹ For works that focus *solely* on friendship in the *Zhuangzi*, see Blakeley (2008); Lee (2014): 55–80.

⁷² *Zhuangzi* (2009): Chapter Six 6:39.

⁷³ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*: Chapter Six 6:44, 6:45.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*.

Such a reaction counts as reciprocity: first there was initiative coming from one person, and to that initiative a corresponding answer was given by the other men. Definition-wise, it is important to note that if there is no initiative regarding proximity coming from a given person, then mere willingness to reciprocate would not be enough to call an act of drawing closer to this person an act of reciprocity. If this were enough, then such actions which are motivated by misinterpreting somebody's behavior as initiative to become closer to one another could also be labeled as reciprocity. But this is not so. If I am wrong in judging another person's action as initiative to become closer to me (due to my wishful thinking, being delusional, etc.), then my own gesture that shows my intention to draw closer to that person cannot be classified as reciprocity; my gesture can be labeled as a reaction to some action, but not as reciprocation. Therefore, apart from the willingness to reciprocate, actual reciprocity requires appropriate evaluation of another person's action and also adjusting one's reaction adequately to that action; in other words, apart from the willingness to reciprocate, reciprocity requires proper responsiveness.

In the light of what has just been said, there is no doubt that the two situations described in the beginning of this section exemplify reciprocity. In fact, many scholars say that the Daoist sage is the paradigm of proper responsiveness;⁷⁶ Slingerland even uses the expression "*perfect sensitivity and responsiveness both to things in the world and to other people.*"⁷⁷ As Wang stresses, the sage's practice makes him "open to the dynamic of relationship self-other, to the relativity and mutual involvement of self and other."⁷⁸ In contrast with an average human being, the sage, whose heart-mind is free from any residue, displays an "unbiased receptivity to things."⁷⁹ The empty heart-mind "takes no distortive action"⁸⁰ and so "what IS can be *as* it is, with no disfigurement."⁸¹ Thus, it is possible for the sage to "appreciate things as they really are"⁸² and also to perceive and embrace a person as she is. The uncluttered heart-mind makes the sage well-equipped for correctly evaluating the actions of others and responding appropriately; thus, the interpre-

⁷⁶ Fraser (2014): 558; Lenehan (2013): 344; Geaney (2012): 14; Cline (2008): 338–339; Graham (1989): 190; Chan (1973): 196, 201.

⁷⁷ Slingerland (2003): 192 (*italics mine*).

⁷⁸ Wang (2000): 355.

⁷⁹ Fraser (2014): 558.

⁸⁰ Heitz (2007): 60.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*.

⁸² Cline (2008): 340.

tative literature gives further support to the thesis that the sage is capable of reciprocity when it comes to developing close relationships.

(3) Non-instrumental treatment

In the case of a Daoist sage, it can be said that his overall approach to others – whether these are human others or non-human others – is such that he treats them non-instrumentally.⁸³ As to the non-human others, this is visible for example in the story about master Lie.⁸⁴ In this story, Lie is still an apprentice and his master is Huzi. Once the master has given his apprentice a very demonstrative lesson about having an empty heart-mind, the sage-to-be concludes that he has not yet managed to learn anything of the Dao. In order to practice the art of emptying the heart-mind and achieve the state in which he would not be ruled by his own *zhi*, Lie comes home to his wife and dedicates himself to cooking for her and feeding the pigs in such a way as if they were human beings. The pigs are treated as beings that deserve care and respect. The manner in which Lie is feeding the pigs is reminiscent of another fragment from the *Zhuangzi* which is descriptive of human beings whose heart-mind is empty:

[...] in the age of perfect virtue, men lived in common with birds and beasts, and were on terms of equality with all creatures, as forming one family – how could they know among themselves the distinctions of superior men and small men? Equally without knowledge, they did not leave (the path of) their natural virtue; equally free from desires, they were in the state of pure simplicity. In that state of pure simplicity, the nature of the people was what it ought to be.⁸⁵

⁸³ Cua (1977): 318 [quoted in Møllgaard (2007): 113]; Machek (2015b): 42, 66; Huang (2010). Some readers may think that this vision of the Daoist sage clashes with the Laozian portrait of the sage who treats all beings as “straw dogs” [Laozi (2007): 5], but I do not think that this is the case. Treating others as straw dogs is not indicative of instrumental treatment, but of a certain impartial distance towards all beings. The sage’s treatment of others mirrors the lack of favoritism (towards any kind of beings) displayed by the Heaven and Earth. Following Wang Bi’s commentary of the *Laozi* fragment about straw dogs [Wagner (2000): 266–268], Rudolf G. Wagner writes that “[b]y being empty, it [= the space between Heaven and Earth] accommodates the ten thousand entities without any preferences” (ibidem: 267). *Per analogiam*, by having an empty heart-mind, the sage is able to look at everything from the detached and unbiased perspective of the center and, consequently, to treat all beings with equal distance and impartiality: on the ever moving and ever changing wheel of existence, all beings have their brief moment of presence in the ritual of life, get “used up”, and pass away. In this sense, it might be said that they are just like the sacrificial straw dogs. That the Zhuangzian sage is able to look even at a loved one from such a detached perspective is visible in the story about the death of Zhuangzi’s wife. See Zhuangzi (1891): Chapter Eighteen (entitled *Perfect Enjoyment*), section 2.

⁸⁴ Zhuangzi (2009): Chapter Seven 7:5–7.14.

⁸⁵ Zhuangzi (1891): Chapter Nine (entitled *Horses Hoofs*), section 2.

Such a respectful attitude is indicative of treating others as subjects and not objects. In the above quotation we see that just like the animals are not treated as inferior, neither are other human beings. A sagely person shall never classify others as 'inferior' in order to feel 'superior'; this would be equal to instrumental treatment in which others are a means to creating a certain image of the self.

That the sage is such a person who does not treat others instrumentally is also substantiated by the interpreters of the *Zhuangzi*. Harold Roth, for example, stresses that Daoist sage's mode of being is not ego-centered but Dao-centered (Way-centered)⁸⁶ – losing one's self implies that the sage shall never use others for his own *self*-interest; instead, a sagely person shall feel the prerogative to respect the unique way (*dao*) of each and every living being. The one Dao comprises the multiplicity of subjective daos, and the sage is capable of "simultaneously seeing unity within multiplicity."⁸⁷ Respecting the uniqueness of all the components of this multiplicity is a topic explored in detail in Yong Huang's paper *The Ethics of Difference in the Zhuangzi*.⁸⁸ Huang shows that treating all things "in light of their uniqueness"⁸⁹ – and thus practicing what he calls the ethics of difference – requires what a Daoist sage has: a clear mind which is empty of any fixed opinions, "universal standards of right and wrong to be projected upon things"⁹⁰ and forcefully imposed upon them.⁹¹ When Lie, who is mentioned in the beginning of this section, does not yet have an empty mind, his conduct is shown as an example of applying instrumental treatment to the world that surrounds him. Huzi, Lie's master, rebukes his disciple with the following words: "You use the Course to browbeat the world, insisting that people believe in it. Because you try to control others, you have allowed yourself to be controlled."⁹² To paraphrase, Lie uses the idea of Dao as a tool of coercion; also, he uses others instrumentally to upkeep the belief of his own superior understanding of Dao. It is only when – after being scolded by his master – Lie begins to *lose his self* in the practice of fasting of the heart-mind that his treatment of others becomes non-instrumental.

⁸⁶ Roth (2003): 26–29.

⁸⁷ Ibidem: 26.

⁸⁸ Huang (2010): 65–99.

⁸⁹ Ibidem: 79.

⁹⁰ Ibidem.

⁹¹ Ibidem: 80.

⁹² Zhuangzi (2009): Chapter Seven 7:6–7:7.

(4) Trust and (5) responsibility-sharing

The above mentioned situation between Lie and his teacher Huzi may also serve as a good example of this kind of responsibility-sharing which is characteristic of close relationships. In order to be able to form close relationships, an individual should possess the competence of sharing responsibility for the close person's moral agency and also for this person's narrative identity: this implies the inter-responsibility for identifying and pointing out to the close other when they err in terms of the truthfulness of their self-narrative or when they cross certain ethical boundaries. I will now describe the interaction between Lie and Huzi in more detail than in the previous section, and then I will explain how this situation between them exemplifies the features characteristic of close relationships which are the topic of this section.

The relevant part of the story starts when Lie meets an uncanny shaman who can tell the lot of every person from just looking at them; as a result, Lie is so impressed that he tells his master he has discovered a doctrine which is superior to the doctrine of Dao. Huzi explains that Lie's physiognomy can be easily read by the shaman because it mirrors everything that can be found in Lie's heart-mind.⁹³ Lie's heart-mind is not empty but full of desire to control others, to make them believe in the doctrine of Dao.⁹⁴ By allowing his heart-mind to be full of such desire, Lie has allowed himself to be controlled by his own *zhi*.⁹⁵ The master adds that he has merely finished showing Lie the "outward ornament [of the doctrine of Dao], not yet its inner reality."⁹⁶ To show to Lie what he means by the inner reality of the art of Dao, Huzi tells his apprentice to bring the shaman. The shaman comes to see Huzi four times, and each time Huzi is able to produce in his own physiognomy a completely different image for the shaman to be read; all the images are inspired by the macrocosmic patterns. The shaman is confused in reading Huzi, judges Huzi to be "an incoherent mess,"⁹⁷ and runs away in panic. Witnessing how his master has managed to be uninterpretable for the shaman, Lie concludes that he has not yet managed to learn anything of the Dao and begins the practice of fasting his heart-mind.

⁹³ In Legge's translation: "When you confront the world with your doctrine, you are sure to show in your countenance (all that is in your [heart-]mind), and so enable (this) man to succeed in interpreting your physiognomy." See Zhuangzi (1891): Chapter Seven (entitled *The Normal Course for Rulers and Kings*), section 5.

⁹⁴ Zhuangzi (2009): Chapter Seven 7:6-7:7.

⁹⁵ Ibidem: Chapter Seven 7:6-7:7 and 7:12 ("Not doing [*wuwei*], not being ruled by your own understanding [*zhi*]").

⁹⁶ Ibidem: Chapter Seven 7:5.

⁹⁷ Ibidem: Chapter Seven 7:8.

This story is a good illustration of the responsibility-sharing which is characteristic of close relationships. First of all, on the basis of his apprentice's reaction to the shaman, Huzi identifies an error in the narrative that Lie is weaving about his own identity – Lie mistakenly believes that he has already possessed a thorough understanding of Dao. Therefore, Huzi explicitly points out to his pupil that he – the teacher – has only finished showing Lie the “outward ornament [of the doctrine of Dao],”⁹⁸ and thus that it is not possible for Lie to have a good understanding of Dao. Furthermore, Huzi makes a practical demonstration of what it means to be at one with Dao to such an extent that the inner reality of Dao is reflected in one's own interiority. By doing so, Huzi enables Lie to grasp an important truth concerning Lie's identity: Lie is still far away from comprehending and incarnating the inner reality of Dao. Second of all, Huzi makes Lie realize that the way he treats others is incompatible with the Daoist ethics. As has been discussed above, a Daoist sage's ethics is the ethics of difference, in which one does not divide beings into superior and inferior ones, but instead respects the uniqueness of every being. Furthermore, one does not participate in “the human language game about right and wrong,”⁹⁹ and so one does not impose any vision of right and wrong onto others. But Lie believes to have mastered Dao and his heart-mind is full of the desire to impose his understanding of Dao – which he identifies as the ‘right understanding’ – onto others. This way, Lie has put himself in a superior position – a position connected with being opposed to other people, which is something a Daoist sage would never do.¹⁰⁰

However, Lie proves to be open to the critique of his teacher – he listens to Huzi and begins practicing the art of emptying the heart-mind. Undertaking this practice makes him change his attitude towards others: we can see him treating both his wife and the pigs in his household with a high level of care and respect. He no longer puts himself in a superior position; he no longer feels opposed to others. Thus, he enters the path of becoming a Daoist sage, Liezi. The fact that Liezi is open to the critique of his master shows that a Daoist sage/sage-to-be is capable of responsibility-sharing not only in the sense that he knows how to be inter-responsible for another person's narrative truth and moral agency (we have seen this ability exemplified by Huzi), but also in the sense that he has the ability to share the responsibility for his own narrative truth and moral agency with another person (this ability has been exemplified by Liezi). This way, the story about

⁹⁸ Ibidem: Chapter Seven 7:5.

⁹⁹ Möller (2006a): 125.

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem: 124.

Huzi and Liezi demonstrates that the figure of a Daoist sage is competent in terms of responsibility-sharing which is characteristic of close relationships. It also demonstrates that a Daoist sage is capable of trust-giving and trust-receiving which take place between close others: Huzi welcomed the trust that Liezi placed in him, and Liezi was able to put his trust in Huzi regarding important and highly personal matters.

It is important to stress once again that it is not simply trust and responsibility-sharing in general which are characteristic of close relationships, but a very particular and intimate kind of trust and responsibility-sharing: the ones that are connected with *a person's narrative truth and moral agency*. For this reason, not all masters and apprentices are going to be in a close relationship, even though a master-apprentice relationship necessitates *some kind* of trust and responsibility-sharing. To give an example, one might easily imagine a relationship between a music teacher and his pupil in which the teacher is focused solely on the betterment of his apprentice as a musician, without any intention of sharing the responsibility for the student's moral agency and narrative identity. Similarly, the student might put his trust in the master as a craftsman, but otherwise judge him to be an unsuitable person to be entrusted with very personal matters. In short, relationships between masters and their apprentices may become close, but need not have to. What makes the situation between Liezi and Huzi a good example of displaying competences characteristic of close relationships is that the trust and responsibility-sharing between the two men are connected with Liezi's narrative truth and moral agency. However, even in the case of Liezi and Huzi, I have not claimed anywhere in this paper that the relationship between them is a close relationship, but only that certain close-relationship competences are displayed within it. To judge the relationship between Liezi and Huzi as a close relationship, more data would be necessary. Finally, I wish to stress that this kind of trust and responsibility-sharing which are characteristic of close relationships can easily be observed outside the master-apprentice context. For a discussion on these competences being present in relationships of a different nature than the one discussed in this section, I refer the reader to my work devoted to the ethical importance of close relationships.¹⁰¹

(6) Persistence in time

The final ability connected with close relationships is persistence in time. As has already been said, if a person is to be seen as a trustworthy close other, this

¹⁰¹ Iwanowska (2016): 15–23.

person has to possess the ability to persist in displaying the close-relationship competences.

In terms of textual evidence, it would be difficult to prove in a straightforward way that a Daoist sage has the ability to persist in time when it comes to manifesting all the close-relationship competences that have been discussed in this paper. In order to prove that, one would have to be able to thoroughly scrutinize one particular Daoist sage in one particular close relationship, or one particular Daoist sage in many close-relationship situations with different people. But the *Zhuangzi* text does not give the reader an opportunity to do so – rather, what we have are bits and pieces of the book that allow us to scrutinize the figure of a sage, embodied by different sagely persons, in various proximity contexts. The only thing that can be textually demonstrated is that some relationships of the Zhuangzian sage persist in time: 1) one good example is what seems to be a life-long relationship between Zhuangzi and his wife¹⁰² (however, we lack the grounds to postulate that the relationship could be classified as a close relationship); 2) another example is what seems to be a long-term relationship between Huzi and Liezi – it appears to be the case that Liezi had been Huzi's apprentice for quite some time since he was able to develop a belief that his understanding of Dao must already be a thorough one (this particular relationship could indeed be a close relationship, although more evidence would be necessary to say so for sure). Establishing this makes it more likely that a Daoist sage may have the ability to persist in manifesting the close relationship competences, but it does not prove that he has this ability for certain. Faced with the lack of textual evidence, it seems worthwhile to entertain a thought that a Daoist sage might not possess this particular close-relationship competence. I shall now discuss an important doubt connected with this topic.

Since a Daoist sage avoids having a fixed identity, it might be doubted whether he can persist in displaying *any* features in a constant way. This seems like a valid objection to consider. However, the important reservation regarding this objection is that not having a fixed identity does not automatically entail a lack of *any kind* of constancy. Rather, it entails the lack of such constancy which is applied without taking into consideration the current surroundings. And indeed, a Daoist sage shall not exemplify such constancy of *any* behavior/feature/competence which is applied merely because this way of being constant is judged as *the right thing to do* or *the right way to be the close other*, since the sage's heart-mind is free of the all the right-wrong distinctions and prefixed judg-

¹⁰² Zhuangzi (1891): Chapter Eighteen (entitled *Perfect Enjoyment*), section 2.

ments. Instead, as the paradigm of proper responsiveness, a Daoist sage shall always take into consideration the beings that surround him and act in response to their behavior. Notice, however, that being responsive *is a constant feature* of a Daoist sage. Also, it is a feature that allows for the persistence of other features of a sagely figure, as long as these features are manifested in response to and in harmony with the sage's surroundings. Therefore, the avoidance of a fixed identity does not bar a Daoist sage from having the ability to persist in displaying all the aforementioned close-relationship competences; rather, it ensures that a Daoist sage shall not persist in manifesting the close-relationship competences in isolation from his close other's behavior. Differently put, avoiding the fixedness of identity entails that the manifestation of close-relationship competences shall be dependent on the behavior of the close other – as long as the close other shall keep stimulating the sage to display the close-relationship competences (in a particular close relationship), the sage shall continue to display them; however, if the other person loses the willingness to be in a close relationship with the sage and, as a result, no longer stimulates the sage to respond in a way which is characteristic of close relationships, then the sage shall adapt to the changing circumstances and stop manifesting the close-relationship competences in a relationship with this particular person.

To sum up, having an empty heart-mind which implies being free from a fixed identity does not bar a Daoist sage from having the ability to persist in manifesting the close-relationship competences. Moreover, the competences in question seem compatible with the art of emptying the heart-mind, since they have been shown to be manifested by the sagely persons in the *Zhuangzi*. This further corroborates the statement that nothing seems to be blocking a Daoist sage from displaying the close-relationship competences in a persistent manner, even though it cannot be straightforwardly proven that the figure of a Daoist sage does, indeed, have the ability to persist in this way.

Conclusions

In the course of this paper, it has been shown that the key feature of a Daoist sage is the cultivation of inner emptiness (*wu*); the sage transcends the human condition and his heart-mind is empty of that which makes us human, meaning thoughts, knowledge, judgments, morality, language, desires, emotions. However, the detachment from and transcendence of the human condition does not render the sage incapable of developing close bonds with other human beings.

The paradoxical nature of this phenomenon is well illustrated in the words of the protagonist of one of the above-mentioned friendship stories: "Who can be

together in their very not being together, do things for one another by not doing things for one another?"¹⁰³ It is the Daoist sage who acts by not acting (*wu wei*), and therefore he can be together by not being together, do things for one another by not doing things for one another. Notice that the expression *wu wei*, which is typically translated as 'non-doing' or 'non-acting', contains the Chinese word *wu*, meaning emptiness. Therefore, *wu wei* can also be translated as 'acting from emptiness,' 'acting with an empty heart-mind.' Since the concept of *wu wei* echoes in what the protagonist says, his words could be paraphrased in the following way: Who can do things for one another and do so from the inner emptiness? Who can create togetherness with other people and act this way with an empty heart-mind? The answer is: a Daoist sage.

In the second part of this paper, it has been demonstrated that, apart from having an empty heart-mind, the figure of a Daoist sage possesses the competences necessary for constructing close relationships. It remains open to question whether a Daoist sage could display these competences in a persistent way, but I have shown that nothing bars the sage from being capable of this kind of persistence. In fact, since the sage is a paradigm of proper responsiveness, it is highly likely that as long as a given person shall continue to act as the sage's close other, the sage shall respond in a corresponding manner and persist in displaying all the close relationship skills.

All in all, a Daoist sage seems well-equipped for creating close bonds with other human beings; even if he is somehow detached from humanity, the sage is not detached from other human beings – only from certain tendencies characteristic of a human heart-mind.

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¹⁰³ Zhuangzi (2009): Chapter Six 6:44, 6:45.

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