

Grzegorz Wita

The Concept of Duty and Transgression in African Ethics

Śląskie Studia Historyczno-Teologiczne 41/2, 443-452

2008

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

GRZEGORZ WITA

University of Silesia, Katowice

THE CONCEPT OF DUTY AND TRANSGRESSION IN AFRICAN ETHICS

The concentration on the act of creation is the principal value in religious life and thinking of the peoples of Africa. Established reality exists because of the Supreme Being who is the creator of all things. To assure continuation of life in peace and prosperity, the world has to bear out the assumptions and maintain the order enforced at the origin of its creation. The Creator's will is passed on from generation to generation through tradition, which is guarded by the ancestors. For this reason, indigenous religion is more ethical than dogmatic by its nature. It demands the specific, principled conduct of life. Therefore, to grasp fully the traditional Sub-Saharan religions, it is necessary to try and comprehend the way in which the ideas of duty and transgression function in Africa. The notions of duty and transgression are the fundamental concepts of each ethics¹.

ABC of African ethics

Family connections and social relations are of great importance in religious outlook. Through the act of creation, God constituted an inseparable union with the world. A man and the community always stay in the centre of this unbreakable unity, which connects the Supreme Being, other supernatural beings and inanimate world. Humankind is also the main object of supernatural beings' actions and activities. As the result of such view, the community has a dominant role. The community is to take care of the relations with supernatural beings since they can affect the fate of living, bring misfortune or prosperity.

An individual and the society can only develop through maintaining the tradition and having respect for the order of the world. Any kind of behaviour aimed against this rule endangers the life. That is why, whatever is done, it should always and above all be oriented at life and harmony maintenance. African morality accents and aims to fullness of life. Everything should serve its protection and development: the order existing in the world, relations between people and the super-

¹ K. Wojtyła, *Elementarz etyczny*, Lublin 1999, p. 38 and next; see T. Ślipko, *Zarys etyki ogólnej*, Kraków 2004, p. 37 and next.

natural beings, and also social order. Referring of everything to the quality of life is *ipso facto* religious activity.

There are some common qualities uniting community. They are considered to have been given by the Supreme Being, and fostered by other supernatural beings. They are regarded as moral virtues by their nature. They define not only the rules which the society operates on, but also constitute ethical pillars of community life. Since it is difficult to analyze the entire African cultural and moral richness, the search scope was limited to the West African nation of Ashantis from Ghana. Because of their history and position in West Africa, it is a representative social group².

Among these moral values which are the most appreciated by the Ashantis, we could enumerate sacrality of life, family, honour, respect, relations between neighbours, dignity, good manners, gratefulness and wisdom³. Since good is interpreted in social categories, the values especially desired are: kindness (*ayamyie*), faithfulness (*nokwardi*), compassion (*mmobrohunu*) and hospitality (*ahohoye, adoe*). The good is determined by the deeds done by the human living in the society⁴. Among the ethical orders there are the following instructions: do not shed blood (except for war time), do not commit adultery, do not commit incest, do not put a curse upon your chief, do not ridicule the weaker. In the positive aspect, they sound as follows: be polite to strangers and children, have respect for the elders, be humble towards those who are senior to you, be a man of the word, compensate in case you hurt somebody. Who wants to live long, must obey these regulations, since both disease and death are considered to be a punishment for evil deeds. Orders and bans are often expressed in the form of taboo. Every citizen shall respect them for the common good since the punishments and consequences refer to the entire community. The Supreme Being (called by the Ashanti Onyame) sooner or later rewards or punishes human's behaviour. The individual who acts well, is often called "God's true child", while an evildoer is referred to as "person who has no fear of Onyame"⁵.

² More on the research on Ashanti people see R. Rattray, *Ashanti*, Oxford 1923; P. Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect. Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture*, Accra 1974; J. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God. A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion*, London 1968²; A. Zajączkowski, *Aszanti – kraj Złotego Tronu*, Warszawa 1963; G. Wita, *Istoty nadnaturalne ludu Aszanti z Ghany*, Katowice 2007.

³ P. Sarpong, *Missio ad gentes in Africa*, *Studia missionalia* 51 (2002), p. 368 and next; see L. Magesa, *African Religion. The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, Nairobi 1998, p. 226 and next; C. Nyamiti, *The Scope of African Theology*, Kampala 1973, p. 9 and next.

⁴ K. Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought. The Akan Conceptual Scheme*, Philadelphia 1995, p. 132.

⁵ P. Sarpong, *Aspect of an African World-View*, in: J.S. Pobee (ed.), *Religion, Morality and Population Dynamics*, Legon 1977, p. 64 and next.

The educational role of oral tradition

True conceiving of indigenous morality is based on transmission and custom. This is the oral tradition that provides the moral code of conduct and specifies ethical attitudes which preserve the order in the universe⁶. The stories about spider Anansi (*anasesem*) also have an educational function in the process of creation of expected ethical behaviours⁷. The diversity of Ashanti philosophy and in consequence, the multiplicity of interpretations of values underlying the patterns of behaviour, is illustrated by the proverbs, their form and content – they are often made up of few enigmatic words or sentences. Proverbs are mnemonic methods of remembering everything what is important for the society, where tradition and the rules of life committed to memory⁸. Proverbs accurately connect a moral norm with the specific context. The same situation can be observed with “talking drums”. The messages drummed during the ceremony sometimes have ethical meaning like e.g. chorus during the chief’s meetings: “If you are in the habit of doing what is just, you live long” (*wodi asem pa a wonyin kye*)⁹.

Some moral values are specially emphasized in proverbs. These are:

- truth: “Honest confession is difficult to make but it brings peace of mind” (*pae mu se ye fere, nso eye ahodwo*)¹⁰;
- generosity and beneficence: “It takes one man to kill an elephant, but it is a whole town that consumes it” (*obiakofo na okum sono ma amanson nhinaa di*). This proverb shows that good deeds and their effects should bring advantage to the greatest number of people¹¹;
- good manners: “If the yam does not grow well we should not blame it, it is due to the soil” (*bayere ammo a, yennunu no aba ne sibere so*). It proves the importance of the quality of home, its products and its good name to which the Ashantis pay much attention¹²;
- obedience and respect: “If you are taller than your father, it does not follow that he is your equal” (*esen w’agya tsentsen a, nna nnye wo pen bi a*)¹³;
- cooperativeness and mutual help: “The left hand washes the right hand, the right hand washes the left hand” (*benkum guar nyimfa, na nyimfa guar benkum*)¹⁴;

⁶ G. Wita, *Podstawy moralności Aszantów*, in: J. Górski (red.), *Nowy kontekst misji ad gentes*, Katowice 2005, p. 76.

⁷ C. Vecsey, *The Exception Who Proves the Rules: Ananse the Akan Trickster*, *Journal of Religion in Africa* 12 (1981), p. 161 and next; see G. Wita, *Istoty nadnaturalne ludu Aszanti w Ghanie...*, p. 95 and next.

⁸ K. Mensah-Brown, *The Nature of Akan Native: A Critical Analysis*, *Sociologus* 20, 2 (1970), p. 136.

⁹ C. Ackah, *Akan Ethics. A Study of the Moral Behaviour of the Akan Tribes of Ghana*, Accra 1988, p. 49, 69.

¹⁰ J. Christaller, *Three Thousand Six Hundred Ghanaian Proverbs from the Asante and Fante Language*, Levistone New York 1990², No. 2580.

¹¹ C. Ackah, *Akan Ethics...*, p. 51.

¹² J. Christaller, *Three Thousand...*, No. 57.

¹³ J. Yadu Bannerman (ed.), *Mfantse-Akan Mbembusem*, Accra 1974, No. 934.

¹⁴ J. Christaller, *Three Thousand...*, No. 81.

- patience: “However long the distance, it ends at the door” (*kwan war a owie abow ano*)¹⁵;
- contentment and gratefulness: “If a quantity of water does not suffice for a bath, it will at least be sufficient for drinking” (*nsu anso eguar a oso nom*). It is customary to show gratefulness many times, for many following days and the more witnesses are present, the better. “If someone takes care of you up to when you have finished teething, you have also to take care of him up to the time when he loses his teeth” (*obi hwe wo ma se fifir a, woso ehwe no ma nedze tutu*). This proverb points the responsibility of children to take care of the parents, especially in their old age¹⁶;
- well-doing: “As long as a man’s head continues to remain in place, it does not cease to wear a hat” (*tsir ntsewee a, wongyaa kyew soa*). It is interpreted as the advice that there is always right time for good deeds¹⁷;
- self-control: “If you ask that a cow be cooked for your breakfast, then what will be used for your soup at lunch?” (*anapaatu na ede womfa nantwi mbo wo ampese ma dzia, nna ewiaber wodze eben adze beye wo nkwan?*)¹⁸.

The moral rules are handed down in the process of upbringing. Since the earliest age the obligations which are in force in society’s life, are inculcated into the young generation. These are advice like: in adults’ presence you should not chew or smoke, you also should not take off your head-dress, do not come to a house without invitation, remember that your left hand should be reserved for toilet related functions, you eat, make gestures and receive gifts with your right hand. Various kinds of taboos are also inculcated into young community members¹⁹.

Expectations towards chiefs and ritual specialists

Ethical obligations are not only for common people. The leaders of Ashanti Confederacy have been reminded of the need of unity. The idea of unity was also supported by serious religious sanctions. It is the head’s of the clan duty to control and care for well-being of the entire group. To do it properly, they should take advantage of the elders’ good advice and help. The chief has a right and duty to deal with disputes so that peace and solidarity rule the society. The queen-mother’s special duty is to watch over women’s and girls’ morality, care for such feminine matters as girls’ nubility rites, ensure unity where rift starts²⁰.

¹⁵ J. Yadu Bannerman (ed.), *Mfantse-Akan Mbembusem...*, No. 1619.

¹⁶ S. Mensah, *Asantesem Ne Mmeebusem Bi*, Kumasi 1966, p. 581.

¹⁷ C. Ackah, *Akan Ethics...*, p. 57.

¹⁸ J. Christaller, *Three Thousand...*, No. 3268; see also C. Ackah, *Akan Ethics...*, p. 59.

¹⁹ R. Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, Kumasi - London 1956², p. 12 and next.

²⁰ M. Fortes, *Kinship and Marriage among the Ashanti*, in: A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, D. Forde (eds.), *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, London 1965, p. 252 and next. By standard a good girl is the one who is the first to greet the others, she is not gloomy but smiling while talking to the elders, always ready to bring help and not likely to quarrel. Then, she becomes praiseworthy and the ini-

The lineage head's first duty is to do his best to preserve and reinforce the order of public life passed on by the ancestors. That is why, the lineage head will call for maturity, caution, patience and wisdom. Tendency to anger and lack of responsibility will not be tolerated since they expose traditional harmony and public order to danger. Power means ability to overcome existing differences and make use of conflicts for the society advantage. The lineage head's strong will is not to be an additional quality of a man in power but the moral requirement connected with this function²¹.

In African structures, religious specialists and chiefs' duties are based on the following assumptions:

1. Indigenous religion, which embraces all aspects of life, does not differentiate between religious specialists and chiefs. The responsibility of each chief covers both spheres. The development of life should always be in his aim, and this aim constitutes the criterion according to which he will be assessed.

2. Indigenous religion has social and ethnic dimension. Religious specialists, who are members of the community, are at the same time responsible for the people. This responsibility is determined by the hierarchy existing in the group.

3. Ritual specialists are responsible for ensuring the intact bond between alive people and their ancestors. Only then, can the entire community enjoy the preservative and continuation of life.

4. The chiefs carry the responsibility to look after everything that happens at the point between visible and invisible world. They can rebuild the order, if it gets disturbed, through prayers, offerings and gifts, correct relations, good attitudes and harmony²².

Chief's responsibility to preserve order and to be faithful to tradition makes them guardians of morality. They are, so to say, in service of supernatural beings, who are ultimate foundation of morality. Political and social power, which is in the hands of king, chiefs and heads of clans, is closely related to their religious functions²³. The elders and the chiefs should be in constant contact with ancestors who remain ever present and active members of society. Consolidation of bonds connecting community here on the earth, demands reinforcement of relations with the ancestors. The link between people and their ancestors has fundamental dimension, and the younger partners of this alliance (i.e. alive ones), carry the consequences of every violation of this existing relation²⁴.

tiation is a good moment to reward her for her good deeds. P. Sarpong, *The Girls' Nubility Rites in Ashanti*, Tema - Ulm 1991, p. 83.

²¹ P. Akoi, *The Sacral Kingship*, in: *Contributions to the Central Theme of the VIIIth International Congress for the History of Religions (Rome, April 1955)*, Leiden 1959, p. 145; see F. Deng, *The Dinka of the Sudan*, New York 1972, p. 113 and next.

²² J. Ferguson, *The Nature of Tribal Religion*, in: E. Ade Adegbola (ed.), *Traditional Religion in West Africa*, Ibadan 1983, p. 242 and next.

²³ V. Turner, *Ritual Aspects of Conflict Control in African Micropolitics*, in: J. Swartz (ed.), *Political Anthropology*, Chicago 1966, p. 246.

²⁴ L. Magesa, *African Religion...*, p. 70.

Transgressions

Ashanti moral duties, so precisely defined, become the criterion defining transgressions and offences against morality. Africans consider the violation of ethical code of social expectations to be an offence. There is the same situation with taboo. Both an individual and the entire society have to obey behaviour regulations to preserve the intact process of life transmission. Antisocial attitudes and breaking these norms are considered to be improper, wrong and sinful²⁵.

To describe transgression, the Ashanti use the term *fom mmarasa* or *tomma-ra*²⁶. The term “disturbing the order” (*mfomdo*) has the similar meaning. The saying “a stranger cannot break the law” (*ohoho nto mmara*) points the attention to the fact that strangers cannot be punished for violating the law, since they are not aware of the norms of the particular community²⁷. According to Rattray’s observation, the Ashanti have two kinds of transgressions: firstly, against social taboo (*oman akyiwadia*), called sins, dealt with on the king’s court and punished most harshly and secondly, problems which can be solved inside a family (*efiesem*). The first category comprises: murder (*awudie*), suicide, some sexual transgressions – incest (*mogvadie*), sexual intercourse with a woman in a state of impurity (*baratwe*) or sexual intercourse in a bush (*ahahantwe*), adultery, defamation (*ahoya, at-endidie, mpim*), theft, betrayal (*epow*), cowardice, witchcraft. The second category contains, among others: adultery (*di obi yare*) (sometimes seen as stealing of somebody else’s wife), malediction, gossiping and lying²⁸.

The adult members of the community know most norms of the moral codes perfectly. Young members learn them from their childhood. During an initiation, the norms get imprinted into youths’ minds and bodies. This is a very specific and practically unforgettable process. Some norms may be less well-known but these are the community leaders who are charged with responsibility to interpret and use them properly. Most often, these less known norms get transgressed without being aware of it. But in such a case, the consequences for the violator are as severe as in the case of person who is totally aware of breaking the rules. However, although the consequences are serious e.g. hunger and diseases, the disrupted order can be restored in an easier way or through simpler purification rites. Even if the specific norm seems to be insignificant it must be obeyed and followed. Its violation causes danger for an individual or the entire community. Because of the inner dynamics and connections in the indigenous religious code of ethics, disrespect for the elders can be considered a serious offence, as well as deliberate avoiding of marriage and childbearing. The refusal to look after a deceased brother’s widow or procreate in his name can result in the similar serious consequences as in

²⁵ B. Bujó, *Etyka. II. W religiach afrykańskich*, in: *Leksykon religii*, ed. H. Waldenfels, Warszawa 1997, p. 115.

²⁶ J. Christaller, *A Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language Called tshi*, Basel 1881, p. 132.

²⁷ J. Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*, Nashville 1979, p. 108 and next.

²⁸ R. Rattray, *Ashanti Law...*, p. 293 and next.

case of negligence to offer sacrifices to gods or libations to the ancestors. The lack of respect for the elders suggests disrespect for ancestors, which are represented in a visible way by the first ones. Negligence to offer sacrifices and carelessness in libations prove the insincerity of these acts. Such behaviour may suggest refusal to have children, which is a very serious transgression. It can be interpreted as manifestation of disrespect and the will to be treated in the similar way by one's own offspring²⁹.

Responsibility

Although the concept of morality in traditional religion assumes that both an individual and the entire community will do everything to suppress the wrong doing, it even much strongly demands to act and behave intentionally and consciously in a good way. In fact, this is the proper behaviour which distinguishes a good person from a bad one. This way African ethics demands maximal faithfulness to the moral code not simply avoiding transgressions.

When the seriousness of transgression is measured, the social standing of culprit is taken into consideration³⁰. It is commonly thought that everything what happens with an individual within community is conditioned by the quality of relations in society. That is why the most serious punishment is meant for those who curse the king. Paradoxically and euphemistically this offence it is called "blessing the king" (*hyira ohene*). It is also a serious trespass to call somebody a fool (*okwasea*)³¹. The violation of social norms brings harm or disaster such as sickness and even death. The preventions include: herbs and roots medicines, spiritual purification, offering of sacrifices, proper behaviour, confession of sins. The connection of Onyame with harms, both as a giver and a saviour, is explained by the proverb: "When God brings you sickness, he also provides you the cure" (*Onyame ma wo yaree a, oma wo eho aduro*)³².

Reinforcing the world through ensuring the harmony and balance between all beings is the most important ethical responsibility of the whole humankind. It creates moral attitudes and it determines the quality of human community life in the world and the quality of the world itself. It requires to get engaged in the process of supporting sanctity in every day life through numerous rituals, since all beings participate in sanctity of life, which results from the mutual dependence³³.

²⁹ R. Rattray, *Ashanti Law...*, p. 374 and next; see L. Magesa, *African Religion...*, p. 154.

³⁰ S. Piłaszewicz, „Niebo” i „piekło” w kulturach Czarnej Afryki, *Euhemer. Przegląd religioznawczy* 35, 3 (1991), p. 8.

³¹ R. Rattray, *Ashanti Law...*, p. 16, 310.

³² P. Sarpong, *The Individual, Community, Health and Medicine in African Traditional Religion. The Asante Model*, *Bulletin. Secretariat pro non Christianis* 28 (1993), p. 275.

³³ H. Sindima, *Community of Life: Ecological Theology in African Perspective*, in: C. Birch (ed.), *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology*, Maryknoll 1990, p. 144.

The role of myth in ethics

Myth is the special tool which insures exceptional, set by tradition, understanding of life. It is a form of symbolic language which expresses the truth about human existence in the way unavailable for rational language. African myths have fundamental meaning for ethics, since they contain elements of religious importance. This importance is characteristic for cosmogonic myths, which give a possibility to describe pure and original tradition. It is a moral duty to preserve this tradition³⁴.

Original order of the world, its law and harmony are seen in ritual. The confirmation of this claim can be found in “upturned teleology” – concentrated on the past, not on the future³⁵. The improper conduct of rituals is seen as violation of prototypes and involves potential and dangerous consequences. The wrong behaviour within the order of the created world, is a dangerous shock for the fundamentals of human existence. The consequences can be very serious. If the order of the world has been violated, consequences again will be very harsh. The Supreme Being, deities, ghosts and ancestors also get shocked. The community may experience untold harm. The striving to preserve peace and order in the world is the most important task for both the Supreme Being and the ancestors³⁶. Negligence of the specific ritual or offering may cause not only ineffectiveness of the rite but it may also bring bitter results³⁷. Wearing an amulet which comes from the temple of some other deity can be considered a serious violation of loyalty to one’s own deity³⁸.

Myth is a source of knowledge about the origin of the world, human being, origin of death, foundations of society, formation of norms, customs and rituals. Myth refers to the primary sacred acts of the Supreme Being and that is why it becomes a model for any great, serious religious acts of man. The main role in a myth is intended for the Supreme Being and thus people shall always have special respect to the mythical order, preserved in religious act of rite. On the basis of mythical knowledge, man tries to copy the acts and achievements of the Supreme Being and other supernatural beings in rites³⁹. It is commonly believed that the mythical reality came to be at the origin of time and has lasted persistently until now. It influences both the world and people’s destination, forms the beliefs and

³⁴ L. Magesa, *African Religion...*, p. 42 and next.

³⁵ N. Booth, *Time and Change in African Traditional Thought*, *Journal of Religion in Africa* 7 (1975), p. 86.

³⁶ E. Ikenga-Metuh, *God and Man in African Religion. A Case Study of the Igbo of Nigeria*, London 1981, p. 144 and next; see T. Chodzidło, *Etyka ludów pierwotnych*, *Roczniki Teologiczno-Kanoniczne* 19, 2 (1972), p. 133.

³⁷ W. Bascom, *Ifa Divination: Communication Between Gods and Man in West Africa*, Bloomington 1969, p. 60; see idem, *Sixteen Cowries: Yoruba Divination from Africa to the New World*, Bloomington 1980, p. 5.

³⁸ B. Ward, *Some Observations on Cults in Ashanti*, *Africa* 26 (1956), p. 55.

³⁹ O. Iloanusi, *Myth of the Creation of Man and the Origin of Death in Africa. A Study in Igbo Traditional Culture and other African Cultures*, Frankfurt a. M. 1984, p. 5 and next.

controls the way of behaviour. It reinforces tradition, brings it prestige since it derives from better, supernatural reality of beginnings⁴⁰. For primitive people myth is often permanent by-product of life and faith. This product forms moral values and norms, social and cultural stability. Cult activity is a dramatic presentation of a specific myth, and its frequent repetition may occasionally be an act of expression of cult nature⁴¹. Myth is considered a social and cultural fundament of community. It turns up on the stage when either some rites or social and moral norms demand explanation, guarantee of tradition, reality and sanctity⁴².

Cosmogony is a prototype of every act, not only because the cosmos is divine creation so it is sacred by its own structure. Do something well, work, construct, create – all these activities mean giving existence to some matter, presenting “life”, making similar to an organism *par excellence*, so to cosmos⁴³. Cosmogony serves as a model whenever one is to create, do something, often something “alive”. Cosmogonic myth, whether connected with hierogamy or not, plays the important role of a model and justification of human acts, but it is also a prototype of entire group of myths and ritual systems⁴⁴.

The basis of Ashanti religion and norms of community life presented in the above article prove, that the main assumptions of ethics have reference to relations between the Supreme Being, humankind and the rest of beings on one hand, and on the other, they depend on the interpretation what is good and what is wrong. The way an individual and the community experience the changing ways of life, its joys and sorrows, gets even clearer thanks to practical implications of the presented assumptions. They show the scheme of belief system which evidently dominates in philosophy of life. Two spheres – natural and supernatural – so tightly connected, penetrate each other persistently and get into interactions, forming religious moral system. Life is a comprehensive principal rule of morality. For Ashanti life is the most crucial category of self-awareness and provides basic assumptions for each interpretation of the world, human, society and supernatural beings.

Invisible world – the place where the Supreme Being and others supernatural beings reside – is *de facto* immoral or overmoral in the sense that ethical judgement cannot refer to the evaluation of its dwellers' behaviour. Only the visible world of people can be the arena of morality and ethical responsibility. People are the subjects of moral good and evil and of proper or improper ethical attitude. Such a situation takes place because of human's sole responsibility for relations between these two worlds. The man is not a master of the world. The man is just in its centre,

⁴⁰ B. Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion and other Essays*, New York 1954, p. 100; idem, *Myth in Primitive Psychology*, New York 1926, p. 18 and next.

⁴¹ A. Jensen, *Myth and Cult among Primitive Peoples*, Chicago 1963, p. 40.

⁴² B. Malinowski, *Myth in Primitive Psychology...*, p. 28; see A. Jensen, *Myth and Cult...*, p. 40; M. Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, New York 1963, p. 14 and next; idem, *Myth, Dreams and Mysteries: the Encounter between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Reality*, New York 1986, p. 23.

⁴³ M. Eliade, *Aspekty mitu*, Warszawa 1998, p. 38.

⁴⁴ Idem, *Traktat o historii religii*, Warszawa 2000, p. 432 and next.

playing role of a user and a beneficiary. For these reasons people should live life in harmony with the world, respect the norms of nature, moral and mystic order. If these definite regulations get unlawfully violated, a man is the one who most severely experiences the consequences which take form of harm and disease.

Mutual relations connecting a man and the community with supernatural beings were discussed in the above article. These relations have their reflection in ethics. The basis of all valuing: life and community, were also presented. Their continuation and persistence are ensured by the customs, tradition and myth present in the ritual. Disregard of these norms leads to the feeling of guilt and offence. The catalogue of duties and transgressions formed on their fundament draws the attention to the specific understanding of evil as an offence against set ritual and social norms, which are conceived to have derived from the Supernatural Being and sanctioned by other supernatural beings.

POJĘCIE POWINNOŚCI I WYKROCZENIA W AFRYKAŃSKIEJ ETYCE

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Przedmiotem rozważań artykułu są relacje łączące Afrykanina z istotami nadnaturalnymi, mające swe odzwierciedlenie w etyce. Podstawami wszelkiego wartościowania są życie i społeczność. Ich kontynuację i trwanie zapewniają zwyczaje, tradycja oraz mit uobecniany w rytuale. Nieprzestrzeganie owych zasad rodzi pojęcie winy i występku. Zbudowany na ich fundamencie katalog powinności i wykroczeń wskazuje na specyficzne rozumienie zła jako wykroczenia przeciw ustalonym normom rytualnym i społecznym, postreganych jako wywodzące się od Istoty Najwyższej i sankcjonowanych przez inne istoty nadnaturalne. Dlatego muszą być podjęte działania przywracające harmonię. Afrykańska moralność akcentuje i jest nakierowana na obfitość życia.