Since most believe anger can be either good or bad, rhetors face a moral problem of determining when anger is appropriate and when it is not. They face a corresponding rhetorical problem in deciding when and how to express anger and determining the role that it might play in public discourse, with specific audiences and in particular rhetorical situations. Rhetorical scholars have catalogued whole genres of angry rhetoric—apocalyptic genres, jeremiads, the demonizing rhetoric of religious and political leaders—wherein the rhetorical display of anger is explained in terms of situational conventions and cultural norms. Yet these scholars have not easily resolved the moral problems associated with angry rhetoric. Aristotle suggested the earliest and most obvious solutions to these problems. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he outlines a typology for discerning the moral limits of anger and, by implication, angry rhetoric. And in Book II of the *Rhetoric* he asserts that the orator needs to know the structure of emotions like anger and how to intensify and dissipate them. Or, in other words, the orator must know how to make it reasonable to be angry. Some contemporary philosophers have gone further, suggesting that a failure to feel and express anger in public betrays an insufficient concern for justice and self respect.

In this essay, we follow Aristotle in arguing that anger is sometimes the emotion we expect people to feel or the rhetorical response we expect them to display and evoke in others. But we also challenge part of Aristotle’s argument by asking: “Even when angry rhetoric would appear to be a reasonable, morally appropriate response, is there a way in which rhetors might manage anger in their public discourse in order to achieve ends which are both morally and pragmatically productive?” The answer, we propose, lies in what we call “non-angry” rhetoric, which involves transforming and reflecting upon anger in public discourse. Because such rhetoric often promotes noble ends such as reconciliation and forgiveness, it is at least morally permissible and more likely morally virtuous. In order to establish these claims, our analysis focuses on the case of Nelson Mandela and his “Address to the Interfaith Commissioning Service for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.” In this speech, Mandela, as our
analysis demonstrates, managed anger and turned it into an object of reflection, thereby illustrating what opportunities for reconciliation and democratic deliberation would look like during the difficult period attending the political transition in South Africa in general and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings in particular. His “Address” exemplified a unique moment when the rhetoric and the ethics of anger came together in a public performance. While acknowledging the understandable anger of blacks, Mandela (who may in fact have harbored considerable anger himself) simultaneously suggested that by engendering a less hostile social-political context, in which participants maintained their self-respect without necessarily sacrificing justice, a new democratic community could emerge. This would be a community where, as he described it, individuals began to reconcile with and no longer persecute one another. As Aristotle might explain, the purpose of Mandela’s speech was to manage the anger of blacks, so that they would then be able to deliberate properly about the issues before the TRC and about the larger democratic transition. As the philosopher Eugene Garver says, the particular passions Aristotle chooses to explore in the *Rhetoric* serve a role necessary for the kind of public, political decision making he assigns to rhetoric. These emotions serve to integrate—or segregate, as the case may be—“distinct individuals into a deliberative or judging body, or *demos*” (1994, 131).

What we are recommending, then, is that rhetoric encompasses both considerations of moral desert as well as broader moral concerns. While there are times when individuals seem to deserve our angry rhetoric, it may not be justified from a broader moral perspective, especially when the goal is the good of the state or the community—viz., if angry rhetoric leads to the violent dissolution of democratic community. Ultimately, we argue that the moral constitution of political, deliberative communities must be viewed in terms of rhetoric and anger—that is, in terms of the ways in which the expression, encouragement, or management of anger in public discourse hinders or assists individuals living, working, and deliberating together. Craig R. Smith and Michael J. Hyde put it this way: *Rhetoric and emotion play “a fundamental role in sustaining the indelible communal and public character of our everyday being-with-others”* (1991, 460). The question before us concerns the role angry and non-angry rhetoric play in “sustaining” a moral community and “being” with the other.

Since Mandela’s rhetoric raises important concerns regarding justice and self respect, we also consider two philosophical arguments that would support the claim that Mandela ought to have expressed and encouraged justified or righteous anger when describing the mission of the TRC. The first focuses on justice and
the second on self-respect. However, in light of how Mandela managed anger in his “Address,” we argue that both of these arguments should be resisted.

1. Rhetoric and (Justified) Anger

In order to define what we mean by non-angry rhetoric, an account of angry rhetoric is also necessary. The Old Testament is filled with many examples of a God and other Biblical characters discoursing angrily in order to achieve moral ends. However, as we pointed out above, Aristotle was one of the first to deal systematically with the relationship between anger, rhetoric, and virtue. In Book 4, Chapter 5 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he concedes the difficulty of coming up with a “formula” for recommending when and how angry a person ought to get. Nevertheless, Aristotle supplies what might be construed as a topology for morally appropriate angry rhetoric, claiming that the virtuous person gets angry only in the manner that reason instructs, and at those people and for that length of time: “what deserves praise” is that we “show anger at the right person, on the right occasion, in the right manner, and so forth, while the extremes and deficiencies deserve blame” (1126b5–10). In other words, according to Aristotle, a person’s anger is justified if and only if it has the right:

1. Object (he is angry with the right people),
2. Intensity and/or expression (he is angry in the right way),
3. Duration (he is angry for the right amount of time),
4. Timing (he is angry at the right time), and
5. Rationale (he is angry for the right reasons).

Aristotle claims that people who do not get angry enough display a vice. He refers to these agents as “slavish” and explains this vice by suggesting that individuals who do not get angry on the right occasions “seem to have no feelings, not even for pain; they do not seem to rise to their own defense, since they do not show anger; but to let one’s own character be smeared and to put up with insults to those near and dear to him is slavish” (1126a5). We can call this Aristotelian theory about the appropriate rhetorical expression of anger the doctrine of justified anger. The doctrine maintains that there are some rhetorical situations where the public expression of anger is appropriate and where its absence is morally blameworthy.
In some instances justice may require angry rhetoric. As Jeffrie G. Murphy (2003) argues, our duty to support the moral order requires angry rhetoric:

We all have a duty to support—both intellectually and emotionally—the moral order, an order represented by clear understandings of what constitutes unacceptable treatment of one human being by another. If we do not show some resentment to those who, in victimizing us, flout those understandings, then we run the risk—in Aurel Kolnai’s words—of being “complicitous in evil.” (20)

Presumably, in some cases the required show of resentment will be non-rhetorical, but in other cases it will be required to engage in rhetoric that shows our resentment. Another argument for angry rhetoric—the most common argument in the philosophical literature—focuses on self-respect. Murphy (1988; 2003) and David Novitz (1998) have elucidated this argument. It once again follows Aristotle in suggesting that individuals who fail to display enough anger in their public discourse are slavish and, therefore, fail to exhibit self-respect.

In the Rhetoric, Aristotle tries to explicate the causes of anger, the state of mind of those who become angry, and those at whom people become angry. Emotions like anger are important to Aristotle’s theory of rhetoric, although it is important to understand that there is a distinction between the emotional state of anger and angry rhetoric. Angry rhetoric, however it is performed publicly, tries to evoke anger in one’s audience, as Aristotle himself demonstrates. Once evoked, anger has enormous implications, significantly altering both the spatial and temporal framework in which audiences see the world. Aristotle recognized that the pleasure of anger derives from the way people imagine how in the future their anger can be appeased. “A kind of pleasure follows from [dwelling on anger] and also because people dwell in their minds on retaliating; then the image [phantasia] that occurs creates pleasure” (1387b2). So an orator dealing with an audience’s anger may encourage it further by envisioning lively images of future vengeful acts. As Smith and Hyde explain Aristotle’s theory, “The more people focus on the future consequences of their anger, the more their sense of space and time is changed. That is, the more vivid the image of revenge, the more the listener ‘lives’ in the future” (1991, 452). Unfortunately, Aristotle offers little obvious advice in the Rhetoric about when it is morally advisable to employ angry rhetoric in public discourse, although he does suggest practical ways for a speaker to “put his hearers . . . into the right frame of mind” with regard to certain issues and the speaker’s persuasive intent (1378a15–16). For Aristotle, the problem of angry rhetoric seems closely connected to ethos or the character of the speaker. However, once again he offers little specific advice about the role anger might play in constituting the ethos of the orator, although we can
speculate, given Aristotle’s discussion in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, that an orator who does not respond angrily when appropriate may give an audience reason to question the speaker’s goodwill, character, or his sense of *phronesis*.

Given the doctrine of justified anger and how it may be played out rhetorically, what constitutes non-angry rhetoric? What might it look like? And in which situations could a speaker use it? Aristotle provides some clues in Book II of the *Rhetoric*, in his discussion of “calmness” (*praoēs*), although he is once again vague about the moral appropriateness of this emotion. Calmness is the opposite of anger or a settling down and quieting of anger. As Aristotle puts it, “Since becoming calm is the opposite of becoming angry, and anger is the opposite of calmness . . . a state of mind of those who are calm should be grasped [by a speaker] and toward whom they are calm and for what reason” (1380a1–2). In his commentary on this section of Aristotle’s work, George Kennedy suggests that the appearance of mildness, gentleness, patience, tractability, and good temper are all aspects of calmness, and that, “As in the case of anger . . . [calmness] has its roots in character” (1991, 130). According to Kennedy, Aristotle believed that rhetors could display calmness in public discourse, as well as evoke it in the minds of the audiences they addressed, thereby encouraging what Kennedy calls “a positive attitude toward others and experience, involving an emotional change toward a tolerant understanding” (130).

We should note that speakers may *calmly* assess situations while intentionally (albeit sometimes indirectly) inviting audiences to be angry. But here we are concerning ourselves with rhetors displaying calmness in order to transform anger in others, although showing calmness (and its various manifestations) in public speech is not the only facet of non-angry rhetoric. A non-angry rhetoric does not just appear calm or encourage calmness in others; it also explains the consequences of anger, such that the expression of anger in whatever form is made the object of reflection and transformed into a greater good. This seems compatible with the approach to Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* taken by Garver, who interprets Aristotle’s theory of rhetorical *pathos* in the broader context of his political and moral writings. According to Garver,

[Aristotle’s] *Politics* differentiates political rule from other kinds of rule, especially the despotic, by saying that we come to rule politically by being ruled politically, The *Ethics* shows how we choose an act by being affected, through passion and desire. The *Rhetoric* fills in the picture further by showing that we become ethical and political agents by experiencing the appropriate emotions, and that we perform our ethical and political functions emotionally as well as rationally. (1994, 108)

Garver argues that, for Aristotle, rhetors have to understand the extent to which emotions such as anger and calm facilitate democratic deliberation. “Since
only individuals feel emotions, but, in the Rhetoric, practical decisions are made by audiences acting collectively as legislatures or juries, the emotions picked out must permit and facilitate participation in such collective decision-making” (131). Garver quotes Aristotle’s Politics to make his point: “The individual’s judgment is bound to be corrupted when he is overcome by anger or some other such emotion . . . it is a difficult thing for all the people to be roused to anger and go wrong together” (III.15.1266a33–36). In short, Garver’s Aristotle saw public speech as a way of orienting citizens toward their civic duties, of correcting aberrant or inappropriate emotions. Speaking angrily or evoking the ire of audiences could be necessary to achieve this goal, but so could what we call non-angry rhetoric.

Angry rhetoric, then, is designed in one fashion or another to make an audience angry (or angrier) and to have them direct this anger toward a particular agent, policy, or idea. When a speaker faces an audience that ought to be angry the doctrine of justified anger would suggest that the speaker ought to use angry rhetoric. We believe, however, that this conclusion should be resisted. It should be resisted because, as bell hooks (1995) argues, rage is a potential cause of violence. Violence is an inappropriately expressed form of rage, a kind of tactic employed by those who are dominated and who believe they have no recourse but to fight their domination through violent means. As she puts it in Killing Race: Ending Racism, “Many African Americans feel uncontrollable rage when we encounter white supremacist aggression. That rage is not pathological. It is an appropriate response to injustice. However, if not processed constructively, it can lead to pathological behavior—but so can any rage, irrespective of the cause that serves as the catalyst” (26). Archbishop Desmond Tutu, whom Mandela appointed to be the Chairman of the TRC, underscored this argument. As Jonathan Tepperman has observed, Tutu emphasized “a Christian theology devoted to rehabilitation, consistently asking victims if they were ready to forgive, and explaining to participants that ‘if you live with hatred and revenge in your heart, you dehumanize not only yourself, but your community” (2002, 134–35). Again referring to Aristotle, Garver makes a similar point about the detrimental effects of anger on community: “Anger . . . can lead to privatization, faction, and undifferentiated benevolence and so destroy the bonds of community” (1994, 130). Therefore, under the conditions where the doctrine of justified anger concludes audiences ought to be made angry, we argue that non-angry rhetoric is a morally attractive alternative—that even if it is right to feel anger, it may be wrong to express it or to encourage it in others. Our analysis demonstrates the extent to which this is the case in the non-angry rhetoric of Nelson Mandela.

As president of the African National Congress (ANC) and of South Africa, Mandela sometimes employed angry rhetoric, as he did during the ANC’s difficult negotiations with the ruling and all-white National Party’s (NP) F. W. de Klerk. Mandela angrily denounced the government because it secretly aided white nationalists and the Inkatha Freedom Party in their armed struggle against the ANC (Sampson 1999). However, at crucial moments during the democratic transition in South Africa (e.g., even as certain radicals within the ANC were calling for armed revolt and retaliation), Mandela displayed remarkable restraint in his public address. He tried to transform anger even when a more explicitly angry response could have been expected and where it might be argued that the absence of such a response was morally blameworthy. There is perhaps no better example of Mandela’s use of non-angry rhetoric than in his February 13, 1996, presidential “Address to the Interfaith Commissioning Service for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.”

After Mandela became president of South Africa in 1994, many black leaders wanted to punish white officials and others who had helped torture, murder, and oppress thousands of blacks during apartheid. They favored establishing a tribunal similar to the one set up in Nuremberg, Germany, in 1945 to prosecute those accused of war crimes during World War II. Complying with a compromise that had been achieved during negotiations leading up to the end of apartheid, Mandel’s government decided instead to create the TRC to investigate apartheid-era atrocities and to place blame on individuals. Under its initial mandate, it granted amnesty to those who publicly confessed their roles and could demonstrate that their actions served political motives. Despite harsh criticism from both whites and blacks, advocates of the commission like Mandela believed that its structure encouraged disclosure of the crimes and allowed the public to assign guilt to culpable individuals. In this view, a public accounting would help heal the nation and discourage future cycles of racial and ethnic conflict. Mandela and his supporters argued that they desired to propel the country forward once the truth of what occurred in the past had been revealed and national reconciliation had begun (Sampson, 1999).

While Mandela had to reassure whites who feared that blacks would use the TRC to exact revenge, the perhaps more pressing issue in his “Address” concerned the simmering anger of blacks and, as we shall see below, the problems of justice and self-respect. Mandela attempted to manage this anger, first by acknowledging the legitimate anger of blacks and explaining its consequences, but then by transforming anger so that it was now consistent
with larger social-political goals. Overall, he enacted a particular way of thinking about and coping with one’s anger—what earlier we recognized as making anger an object of reflection and changing it into a greater good. In other words, Mandela rhetorically constructed a moral framework in which it made good sense to reconcile and move on rather than to exacerbate the existing anger and perpetuate the cycle of violence. This was not only a just framework for a nation in the midst of a democratic transition but also a framework in which the demands of justice as they appeared at that moment could be more constructively conveyed and discussed.

Hence, Mandela began his speech by thanking the commissioners for their work but also recognizing the potentially volatile nature of the immediate situation. He pointed out, for example, “Yours is a task of extreme difficulty and of great consequence to the future of our nation.” The task was “extreme” and of “great consequence,” in part, because the anger that many blacks harbored toward whites might disrupt the upcoming proceedings. As Anthony Sampson notes, gestures of forgiveness such as the TRC brought about “the anger and suspicion of some black militants who saw their president in league with their enemies” (1999, 516). Thabo Mbeki, then Mandela’s deputy, said that, as far as the TRC was concerned, the cry within the ANC was “to catch the bastards [the white agents of apartheid] and hang them” (quoted in Tepperman 2002, 133). Undoubtedly, much of this emotion was a direct product of the conditions of apartheid.

We should acknowledge here that speakers address emotional conditions already in play for an audience, such that it is difficult to talk about the rhetoric apart from these existent emotional states. However, it is important to understand that distinction and to examine its logic in rhetorical discourse such as Mandela’s “Address.” Speakers have to work with the emotional conditions that audiences bring to the situation. It is in this sense that Mandela was able to distinguish between psychological states of anger (as he might have experienced them or as he suspected his audiences did) and the management of anger in public discourse. This is probably why, although Mandela had on many occasions like this one demonstrated patience, tractability, and good temper—elements of calmness—he did not shy away from a forceful description of what he believed had transpired under the apartheid regime, what he called in the next section of his speech “gross violations of human rights.” Such “violations,” he seemed to be arguing, legitimized the anger of blacks. Anger was simply a part of the harsh legacy of a past that was still in some important respects present, something that at this juncture in the democratic transition Mandela could not completely deny. Thus he conceded in his “Address”: “Even if politicians could agree to
suppress the past . . . they would be mistaken in doing so.” In light of what had transpired in the past, Mandela would seem to have agreed with Aristotle that the object, the intensity, the duration, the timing, and the rationale of black anger were wholly appropriate.

Recalling bell hooks (1995), though, while the destructiveness of racism must be acknowledged, this rage should be transformed into “constructive” ends in order to rid a society of racism and usher in a new community. So how was the rage transformed and toward what moral and political ends? In perhaps the most important section of his “Address,” Mandela suggested some possibilities. Framing the moral significance of the TRC, he argued that South Africans must use the hearings to come to terms with the past in ways which will enable us to face the future as a united nation at peace with itself. To you [members of the commission] has been entrusted the particular task of dealing with gross violations of human rights in a manner that ensures that the painful truth is laid bare and that justice is done to the victims within the capacity of our society and within the framework of the constitution and the law. By doing so, and by means of amnesty, your goal is to ensure lasting reconciliation. . . . Ordinary South Africans are determined that the past be known, the better to ensure that it is not repeated. They seek this not out of vengeance, but so that we can move into the future together.

In this passage, Mandela urged blacks to deliberate in a manner that transformed whatever anger or “vengeance” they experienced as a psychological state. Aristotle might say that, insofar as it was possible, Mandela transformed anger or hatred into mildness and good temper, the assumption being that one would be better able to deliberate individual judicial cases were one to experience a state of calmness. As we suggested at the outset, the key is that Mandela himself appeared to be “performing” just this sort of deliberation, as he publicly set forth the ground rules for the TRC. His speech was as much a call to a certain mode of feeling one’s way through deliberation as it was a performance of it. Garver might say he was attempting to set the appropriate mood for “laying bare” the “painful truth” in a manner consistent with the recently established “framework of the constitution and the law.”

But how else was Mandela’s approach transformative? It was transformative, we argue, because it invited audiences to put their anger in the service of “truth,” “justice,” “peace,” “unity,” and “reconciliation,” transcendent principles to which all other concerns, including one’s own anger, must be subordinated if the TRC and the larger democratic transition of which it was a part were to succeed. Equally important, Mandela’s speech had the transformative effect of depriving the past of the power to lower the moral standards of the present,
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something in which blacks could take great pride. For, as Sampson has observed, by placing blacks right in the center of the TRC’s proceedings, Mandela also put them into a position of “moral supremacy,” reminding everyone that the balance of power had finally shifted (1999, 515). Indeed, for Mandela to speak in a way that exploited this existing anger and subsequently motivated blacks to engage in violent reprisals would have been to relinquish the moral high ground.

Mandela’s non-angry rhetoric was transformative, too, since it placed his audience into a substantive relationship with victims of apartheid, who in the context of a heated political situation like the commission’s proceedings might have been ignored or defamed. For example, as suggested above, approaching the TRC differently Mandela (or an official like him) could have been tempted to focus all of his rhetorical energies on manipulating the anger of blacks as a way of denouncing and seeking “vengeance” against individual perpetrators of apartheid, and not enough on remembering the victims or on urging the commissioners forward. However, in his “Address” Mandela focused on the need to assist the victims of apartheid: “Too often, victims have been neglected in our society. It is necessary that we identify the individuals who have suffered and their families.” One could “identify” the “victims,” without provoking additional anger against the victimizers, and find productive ways of aiding the victims where the act of assistance itself transformed the anger. Mandela’s “Address” encouraged this approach. We might say he inverted the pleasure associated with thoughts of unleashing one’s anger toward the perpetrators of apartheid, so that pleasure was now gained from helping the victims.

Still, how does one speak about the object of anger? And what might the social-political consequences be of addressing one’s former enemies in an alternative, “non-angry” way? Aristotle would most likely argue that it would have been reasonable for Mandela to persuade his audiences to express explicit anger towards people who did horrendous wrongs, if it added rhetorical strength to the side of justice. However, in his “Address” Mandela explained what he considered a creative turnabout between victims and perpetrators: “Forces locked in apparently irreconcilable conflict found a negotiated path to a democratic constitution.” Once again: “Time and again, the prophets of doom have been confounded by the capacity and determination of South Africans to solve their problems and to realise their shared vision of a united, peaceful and prosperous country.” Here he reflected upon what he thought was a reasonable course of action—how, by transforming their anger, blacks had moved toward the larger goal of solving “their problems” for the future, which included working with the seemingly “irreconcilable” enemies. As Aristotle might explain, orators should “produce such a feeling in [audiences] by having made them regard
those with whom they are angry as either persons to be feared or worthy of respect or benefactors or involuntary actors or as very grieved by what they have done” (1380b17). Mandela entreated one-time enemies to consider each other as “benefactors” of a newly created democracy; but he also asked audiences to understand that many of the perpetrators of crimes were in some sense “involuntary actors” and “grieved by what they” had done under apartheid. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, a major condition of the TRC was that, in order to receive amnesty, perpetrators had to fully disclose their crimes and prove that their actions were politically motivated. Perhaps some of them would demonstrate contrition for these crimes as well. Certainly, this effort to transform anger alleviated some of the anxiety experienced by many whites fearing general reprisals, especially those about to account for their crimes. At a deeper moral level, though, Mandela emphasized—and his own rhetoric exemplified—that managing the psychological state of anger in this way was constitutive of real democratic change and community formation.

In other words, Mandela presumed that the kind of anger blacks experienced as a psychological state was detrimental to the nation’s future. Blacks could not, in his estimation, respond with or act out of residual anger that might lead to the sort of “pathological” violence described by hooks or the “dehumanized” community about which Tutu warned. So Mandela asked them to reflect upon the consequences of (managing their) anger and to discover new emotional ways of dealing collectively with the commission and its host of victims and criminals. As Garver (1994) might explain, Mandela’s “Address” created a moment during which the speaker and the audience realized a “community” characterized by the emotions appropriate for deliberating about matters before the TRC, when the audience comes to “recognize that they have [emotions] qua parts of a community. It is a community of pleasure and pain because members of the audience recognize each other as having the same emotions, and that mutual recognition is necessary for philia” (132). This had to be a community of (formerly politically disaffected) angry blacks coping with whites, many of whom had persecuted them, or what Smith and Hyde called “being-with-others” in community, where non-angry rhetoric helped “to structure the existential temporality and spatiality of” South Africans’ communal existence (1991, 449).

By illustrating how everyone was touched by violence in South Africa—in the past, the present, and especially the future—Mandela may have motivated those obsessed by their own anger to focus more generally on the practical problems and the opportune moments at hand, the challenges of the newly created nation as a whole. As he put it in his speech, “the whole South African nation has been a victim, and it is in that context that we should address the restoration of
dignity and the issue of reparation. . . Above all, the healing process involves the nation, because it is the nation itself that needs to redeem and reconstruct itself” (my emphasis). Obviously, Mandela had been a victim, yet his own “healing” did not mean acting out of the psychological state of malice or anger, something that would neither “redeem” nor “reconstruct” South Africa. Rather, Mandela was asking that both black and white South Africans demonstrate selflessness, as he was doing in his speech and in his politics. In effect, this meant recognizing their “victim” status but then transforming all that the victim metaphor signified about the “nation” in general, including its stewing anger. Once again, rather than allowing anger to motivate additional violence, a form of justice that might mollify only certain individuals or groups, Mandela required that South Africans see national “restoration” and “reconciliation” as primary goals.

Clearly, the actual details of this national reconciliation were still to be worked out, if they were ever worked out completely at all. Nevertheless, for Mandela, reconciliation seemed to be tied directly to the transformation of anger to which he devoted so much time and energy in his speech. Altering the victim metaphor was meant to awaken his audience to these possibilities and, therefore, to the “choice” before them of continued anger and violence versus the relatively peaceful creation of a new political community, in which the victims and perpetrators managed their anger and were now equal under the law. Mandela put it this way: “The choice of our nation is not whether the past should be revealed, but rather to ensure that it comes to be known in a way which promotes reconciliation and peace. This will also impact on our ability to end violent crime and establish the rule of law, today.”

3. A Challenge for the Doctrine of Justified Anger:
Two Unsatisfactory Answers

Why would we want to claim, as the doctrine of justified anger does, that Mandela’s rhetorical response to the injustice of apartheid was misguided? In this section, we will look at two arguments that would support the doctrine of justified anger in its claim that Mandela ought to have expressed and encouraged justified or righteous anger—the first focuses on justice and the second on self-respect. In the end, however, we argue that both of these arguments should be resisted.
Justice

The first argument is that agencies such as TRC show an insufficient concern for justice. As Elizabeth Kiss (2000) observes, for critics the TRC sacrificed justice for political power. Justice would have required that individuals face criminal prosecution and/or receive retributive punishment. Even if Mandela secured a peaceful political transition he did so by sacrificing the more important goal of justice (or transgressing the moral constraint of justice), and that if Mandela had pursued retribution in policy and rhetoric, the response to apartheid would have been more just.

Did Mandela sacrifice the ideal of justice and did he implicitly endorse such a sacrifice in his rhetoric? While we do not wish to engage in a full-blown defense of the TRC here, we should mention several ways that the commission, especially as Mandela framed its mission above, served the value of what Kiss calls “restorative justice,” which “is concerned not so much with punishment as with correcting imbalances, restoring broken relationships—with healing, harmony and reconciliation” (69; see also Rotberg and Thompson 2000). We might try to understand restorative justice as a repudiation of a more widely accepted juridical ideal, but this ideal has several elements widely recognized as elements of justice. This enables us to see that the charge that Mandela’s non-angry rhetoric ignored justice is misplaced.

First, before the TRC began its hearings victims were promised monetary compensation if they testified. Though initially delayed, the compensation was finally distributed in 2003, to mixed reviews. While monetary compensation cannot restore the dignity of someone whose human rights were violated, it does provide a public recognition of harm done and dignity denied. As such, it is a clear public statement affirming the moral worth of the victim, something Mandela himself acknowledged. Second, as Mandela explained, the commission gave the victims a voice. Victims were able publicly to testify before the commission and articulate the story of how they suffered. Again, while such disclosure may not restore a victim’s dignity, it does provide public recognition of wrongs done and a reaffirmation of the victim’s moral status, something Mandela emphasized when he said the commission must ensure “that the painful truth is laid bare and that justice is done to the victims.” Third, perpetrators also testified, subjecting themselves to public shame and sometimes significant personal loss. Here the perpetrators’ conduct was publicly recognized as wrong, what Mandela called “a gross violation of human rights,” and the harsh treatment served the traditional goal of retribution. But Mandela did not dwell angrily on these violations or embellish them in any way in his public speech, thus adding to the anger of oth-
ers. Fourth, the perpetrators frequently apologized and the victims, or families of victims, often accepted those apologies. The contribution toward justice here is the same as the above—recognition of harm and dignity—but the agent differs. Instead of a public recognition of dignity, this acknowledgement is recognition by the very person who committed the wrong.

Finally and most importantly for our purposes, Mandela articulated a restorative notion of justice rooted in the desire to rebuild relationships with one’s former enemies and to recognize them as active social partners in a newly constituted nation. This notion of justice was premised on the moral realization of the need to transform one’s anger toward the other rather than using it to justify acts of “vengeance,” as Mandela feared many blacks desired to do. The TRC became an institutional embodiment of this transformational approach and thus an instrument of democratic transition. As Jonathan Allen (1999) suggests, Mandela’s rhetoric provided a “public marker of . . . citizens’ rightful passage into equal consideration and respect.” Rhetorically, Mandela framed the TRC’s purpose as an opportunity for understanding how the sense of injustice was corrupted under apartheid and introduced an educational element, what Allen (1999) calls an “ethos,” that may be crucial to the success of democratic transitions in general.

Despite these efforts to facilitate restorative justice, critics complained that individuals who committed crimes did not necessarily have to face criminal prosecution or serve time in prison. To many this did not seem fitting. It appeared that the treatment of human rights violators was too lenient. As Wole Soyinka suggests about truth and reconciliation commissions in general, “This risk-free parade of villains, calmly—and occasionally with ill-concealed relish—recounting their roles in kidnappings, tortures, murders, and mutilation, at the end of which absolution is granted without penalty or forfeit, is either a lesson in human ennoblement, or a glorification of impunity” (1999, 28–29). Critics like Soyinka seemed to believe that political leaders such as Mandela should have publicly promoted retributive justice for those white torturers and killers who committed horrendous crimes against blacks.9 The theory of punishment that supports this focus on desert is retributivism. While there are numerous variations of retributivism, in its purest form it makes three claims: moral guilt is necessary for justified punishment, moral guilt is sufficient for justified punishment, and finally the proper amount of punishment is the amount equal to the harm done by the criminal (Shafter-Landau 2004).

A plausible retributivist critique of Mandela’s rhetorical support of amnesty must focus on the third claim of retributivism, for nothing in Mandela’s rhetoric or the commission’s activities conflict with the first two claims. That
moral guilt is necessary for punishment is uncontroversial in this context—Mandela did not support the punishment of innocent individuals. The second claim is less clear, but still provides no critique. The second claim suggests that all moral wrongdoers should receive some punishment. While the term amnesty may suggest that defendants receive no punishment, amnesty, as Mandela pointed out, was only granted on the condition of public testimony and confession of crimes. There was no general amnesty, so individuals who chose not to come forward remained liable and, in fact, were subject to prosecution. Additionally, because the testimony was public the requirement to testify is best seen as an example of punishment by shaming, which has a long history perhaps most vividly seen by the use of the pillory in the American colonial period. (Recently, shaming has seen a modest revival in American courts.) Consequently, Mandela’s advocacy of amnesty in exchange for public testimony should be viewed as amnesty from criminal prosecution and civil liability in exchange for a particular kind of punishment. It does not deny the retributivist claim that moral guilt is sufficient for punishment.

The question that remains is whether forced public testimony is enough punishment for the violation of human rights—that is, does it violate the retributivist ideal of the proper amount of punishment? How do we determine how much punishment a particular criminal deserves? The classic retributivist answer to this question is *lex talionis*—a criminal’s punishment should inflict the same amount of harm on him as he inflicted on his victim(s). But the implausibility of *lex* is especially clear when we look at cases of gross violations of human rights. Perhaps some would advocate the death penalty for all cases of murder, but few would advocate torture for torturers. Unless we advocate the punishment of torture for torturers, a retributivist theory of punishment does not give us a clear answer to the question of how much punishment a particular criminal deserves. We will have to look beyond the question of moral desert to determine how much punishment is appropriate. And this is the approach that Mandela recommended. While he acknowledged the importance of considering moral principles such as “truth,” he also offered that at a minimum, other concerns, the practical problems of peacefully moving democratic change along, for instance, needed to be factored when coming to an answer regarding justice.

If determining what justice requires is not merely a matter of consulting a single abstract principle of desert, then social-political context matters, as it mattered to Mandela. Consequently, the claim that justice was sacrificed seems unfounded and even the weaker claim that justice was compromised is not a conclusion that we need to draw. The question of what punishment a criminal ought to receive is a question that must be answered in social-political context.
It is not one that can be determined independent of such questions and then balanced against other social-political concerns. In this way restorative justice can be seen not as an alternative to widely accepted ideals of justice but as an application of widely accepted ideals of justice to the unique social-political context of South Africa transitioning to democracy.

Self-Respect

While the most common criticism of Mandela and the TRC was their insufficient concern for justice, a well-known philosophical argument for anger and, by implication, for angry rhetoric, focuses on self-respect. As we already saw, the argument has its roots in Aristotle, who claimed that individuals who fail to display enough anger are slavish, presumably because they defer anger or the rhetorical expression of anger, even when anger and its rhetorical display are morally appropriate. Like a slave, one might feel that her ill treatment is appropriate and that she deserves no better, so there is no morally appropriate reason to respond angrily or with angry rhetoric to the harsh treatment. Yet on many occasions such “slavish” action diminishes one’s self-respect.

This characterization clearly misses the mark with Mandela, whose non-angry rhetoric was not slavish. Aristotle’s argument imagines one motive for avoiding anger or angry rhetoric—slavishness—and then suggests that all individuals who avoid them have that motive. Aristotle is right that one might be motivated to avoid anger or angry rhetoric out of a slavish sentiment, but he mistakenly believes that this is the only motivation. The argument clearly over-generalizes.

The contemporary philosophical account of justified anger seems to make the same mistake as Aristotle. For example, Murphy (1988) suggests that forgiveness is sometimes a vice. He states: “Indeed, if I am correct in linking resentment to self-respect, a too ready tendency to forgive may properly be regarded as a vice because it may be a sign that one lacks respect for one’s self” (17). It is interesting that Murphy claims that the tendency to always forgive may be a sign that one lacks self-respect, since his conclusion depends on a much closer connection. If a readiness to forgive need not be motivated by a lack of self-respect, then a readiness to forgive need not conflict with the value of self-respect. We cannot call forgiveness a vice simply because it may sometimes be motivated by a lack of self-respect, any more than we can call truthfulness a vice simply because it may sometimes be motivated by a desire to look good in front of our friends or some other ignoble reason. Novitz (1998), who endorses
Murphy’s position, has the same problem. Novitz states: “To be too willing to undertake [forgiveness], or to undertake it in inappropriate circumstances, is a vice since it is indicative of diminished” self-respect (299). Yet, the willingness to forgive need not indicate diminished self-respect.

Mandela provides a counter-example to Aristotle’s charge of slavishness and to both Murphy’s and Novitz’s charge of a lack of self-respect, but these arguments in favor of anger may gain some plausibility when applied to Mandela’s case. While Mandela did not lack respect for himself, perhaps his rhetoric ran the risk of encouraging his listeners to respond to the injustices they suffered in a way that was slavish or lacked self-respect, since some victims may not want to forgive or they may want to but may not be ready to.

Despite this, a judgment about whether the TRC unduly pressured victims to forgive would have to look at each individual case. But this would be a criticism of the commission’s conduct rather than Mandela’s rhetoric, which seemed to promote forgiveness through reconciliation even if it did not always achieve it. For Mandela’s rhetoric to be problematic the problem must lie in advocating a path of forgiveness rather than retribution, not a particular problem that may or may not have arisen in its execution. Here one might claim that while Mandela tried to transform anger without being slavish or having a diminished self-respect, the general population listening to his public speeches could not. Perhaps Mandela’s rhetoric is just beyond the reach of an ordinary person—it is something that may be possible for saints or for him but not for the rest of us. Consequently, by advocating forgiveness (instead of anger and vengeance) Mandela was unintentionally promoting diminished self-respect.

Is a forgiving but not slavish response to injustice a reasonable goal for ordinary individuals? Apparently, Mandela aspired to manage anger in his rhetoric, and he took those rhetorical actions that best relieved suffering. He cultivated in himself and in others noble dispositions or virtues such as discipline and calmness that minimized the occasions where he and others would become angry or act out of malice, and he cultivated dispositions or virtues that managed anger when it arose. As Mandela rhetorically defined it, an individual who encountered offense, abuse, or injustice aspired to have the most beneficial response possible while avoiding the dangers of retributive feelings. During an interview for “Frontline” (2002), Archbishop Desmond Tutu described Mandela’s rhetorical approach this way: He helped “to move away from what would have been the normal [angry] reactions and responses that are destructive and move them in a direction where those forces are transmuted, and they become forces for good.”
The problem of self-respect is clearly connected to the problem of justice. Individuals demonstrate a lack of self-respect when they tolerate being the subject of injustice. But one can stand up to injustice without anger or displays of angry rhetoric. At least in Mandela’s “Address,” he showed no tolerance toward the injustice of apartheid, but he also avoided lashing out at apartheid’s perpetrators in a manner that guaranteed further hostility. His rhetorical response “transmuted” hostility, making it a “force for good.”

4. Conclusion

The argument we have proposed here leans toward the view that in many cases the transformation of anger is the strategic and practical choice for the development of democratic community. Admittedly, such a view raises questions about whether ours is a moral/ethical argument about rhetoric or a moral/ethical argument about political goals and aspirations in places like South Africa, where rhetoric may be construed as reducing the moral/ethical evaluation of rhetoric to its capacity to serve political or moral ends. This is an ancient problem for rhetorical scholars, one we cannot possibly reconcile here. Nevertheless, the moral status we attribute to non-angry rhetoric cannot be dismissed. As we said at the beginning, the moral constitution of political, deliberative communities must viewed in terms of the ways in which anger becomes apart or the subject of public speech and promotes/diminishes public deliberation. As Garver says of Aristotle’s theory of rhetoric, the “emotions sometimes make practical judgments wise and determinate by considering the particularity of a case, and they sometimes corrupt judgment by making it partial, using those same particularities to override justice” (1994, 106).

The potentially transformative possibilities of non-angry rhetoric make it reasonable for agents to pursue their own welfare and the welfare of others. Still, critics might object that there is no basic moral priority that privileges non-angry rhetoric over angry rhetoric, so our argument cannot sway one toward one pole over the other. If this were true, one might have identified a fatal flaw in the internal logic of our essay. But we do not believe it is true. Our claim, and the evidence that backs it up, does not argue for a general rejection of the doctrine of justified anger; it argues, instead, that we recognize that on certain occasions, angry rhetoric would be appropriate. At the same time, it acknowledges that agents seeking to manage anger rhetorically might cause less
serious harm to (a nascent) democratic community and are, therefore, morally virtuous. The appropriateness of other kinds of responses is not undercut by anything that we say.

Kenneth S. Zagacki:
Department of Communication
North Carolina State University

Patrick Boleyn-Fitzgerald:
Department of Philosophy
Lawrence University

Notes
2. For recent studies examining the issue of reconciliation in South Africa, see Erik Doxtader (2001) and Philippe-Joseph Salazar (2002).
3. The text for Mandela’s speech was retrieved on November 1, 2000, from the Website of the African National Congress. See <www.anc.org.za/index.html>.
4. There is no necessary connection between a speaker using angry rhetoric and a speaker feeling angry. A speaker might not feel the emotion but feign it for rhetorical affect. Cicero hints at the possibilities for fakery and deception in De Oratore. Although he has Antonius swear that he has never attempted “to arouse either indignation or compassion, either ill-will or hatred” in an audience “without being really stirred” himself, the very raising of the issue recognizes that one may either conceal anger or pretend to be angry, depending on one’s rhetorical purposes. See De Oratore (2.189).
5. A very good example of the power of angry rhetoric, delivered by a speaker who is, it is claimed, experiencing anger, appears in Book II of Cicero’s De Oratore, where Antonius reveals that “in prosecuting my comrade and quaestor, [I] had kindled such a blaze, not by eloquence only, but far more by vehement, indignation and fiery enthusiasms, that I hardly ventured to draw near and put it out” (185–216). As Jeffrey Walker (1992) points out, Cicero may have been showing off his character’s oratorical skill, but he was also cautioning speakers who incite the audience’s anger or other potentially volatile passions to be prudent. It is better, Cicero suggests, to incite these emotions in a proper manner and without exaggeration or hurry and interspersed with conciliatory passages.
6. On the National Public Radio program, “Mandela: An Audio History, Part 5: Democracy” (2004), P. K. Botha described Mandela’s surprisingly reconciliatory approach to these negotiations: “He made a study of the Afrikaner history . . . telling us, ‘Look, I know you and I respect what you’ve gone through.’ He didn’t come up with a statement of bitterness, retribution. No, a man, after twenty seven years of being robbed of his freedom, and to then come forward and start [peaceful] negotiations on that basis—remarkable.”
7. Several assessments of Mandela’s conciliatory style of interaction can be found in Sampson’s chapter entitled “Forgiveness,” where for example he quotes Graca Machel, for whom Mandela “symbolizes . . . forgiveness and understanding and reaching out. If he had come out of prison and sent a different message . . . this country would be in flames. . . . [He sent] the message of what he thought was the best way to save lives . . . to bring reconciliation. . . . Some people criticize that he went too far. There is no such thing as going to far if you are trying to save this country from this kind of tragedy” (1999, 525).
8. As Jennifer L. Llewellyn and Robert Howse (1999) suggest, Mandela’s discourse sought to restore the fundamental social relationship of equality between victim and perpetrator that had
been disturbed by the perpetrator’s crimes, with the final goal of guaranteeing that both victim and culprit could “live as equal citizens of the society in question.”

9. In South Africa, Nontsikelelo Biko allied with families of several other murdered apartheid activists and filed suit in South Africa’s Constitutional Court, hoping to block the TRC’s amnesty provisions as fundamentally unjust. She was the widow of black rights advocate Stephen Biko, who had been beaten to death in police custody.

Works Cited


