The following paper is a discussion of justice as a sign in transition, a sign whose meanings in post-apartheid South Africa must be legitimated by appeal to conditions radically different from those that prevailed under apartheid. I wish to explore the nature of the transformation of justice from the context of apartheid to emergent postapartheid conditions and to do so by focusing on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (the TRC) as an example of what can be called ‘transitional justice’. A common view of the TRC is that its rules for the implementation of amnesty and other related matters should be evaluated in the light of ‘ideal types’ of justice. The TRC must fall short of such ideal types, since its offer of qualified amnesty to perpetrators of gross human rights violations in exchange for complete honesty about such violations will be understood as an exigency which dispenses with a crucial feature of justice, namely retribution.