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Letters

Rules of conscience

Betray ethics, betray trust

The harm caused by the interrogation methods described by Pope and Gutheil goes far beyond the considerable damage, sometimes fatal, of methods commonly understood to be torture.¹ When psychologists or doctors design and help to inflict such methods, they engage in three betrayals. They betray the trust and human rights of those who are tortured. They betray fundamental professional ethics.² And they betray the trust society places in such professionals.³

The harm caused by acts that are physically, sexually, or psychologically damaging—for example, child abuse—is greater when a trusted figure is involved.⁴ The Orwellian transformation of trusted professionals into those who use their training and skills to design and help inflict methods whose reality is masked by euphemisms such as "harsh" or "extreme" can interfere with the ability to reason realistically.⁵

The trauma that occurs when professionals betray individuals, fundamental ethics, and society affects us all.

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