

J. Sellen

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Robert G. Heath, M.D.  
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Dear Bob,

Thank you for sending me a copy of the preprint describing your recent findings in primates smoking marijuana, and the kind comments on the 1961 discussion of your work. I thought then, and still believe, that you and your associates have been among the most original and intrepid investigators in America. My kind views then are still the same today.

However, in some issues, the data that you present is inconsistent with those produced by other observers and the source of the inconsistency has to be found. I have stated in the past, and still believe, that the principal findings of the toxicity of cannabis smoking is to be found in examinations of the users. They, alone, have the experience from which we can derive a realistic estimate of toxicity. The smoking by primates, under artificial conditions can, at best, provide clues as to what systems should be examined.

I have dedicated six years of effort to examine the effects of cannabis in volunteers in New York and chronic users in Athens. My experience is extensive, probably as extensive as any of the younger investigators writing today, and as I wrote in a number of reports, including the final section of the volume *Hashish- Studies of Long-term Use*, published by Raven Press. I commend the section to you for the best opinion that I have on the subject.

As your letter reflects, the issue is no longer one of fact or science, but of emotion and politics. I regret that you have seen fit to allow your name and work to be used in the public press and that you have sought to enjoin in public argument. I have not followed this road, as you well know. Indeed, I have stopped my work in cannabis since leaving the New York Medical College (1973).

I have read your report and remain unconvinced. What controls do you have for the readings in these monkeys? Is there a population of monkeys that have smoked tobacco under the same conditions? That seems to me to be an obvious control. Another, what of monkeys that have smoked THC free material? If the slides are mixed between control monkeys and those exposed to cannabis, what is the frequency of identification that an observer can make of the effects that you cite as the result of cannabis smoking? What evidence is there from studies in man of these findings?

In any case, I am honored that you think my opinion is of some merit. It is kind of you to send me the reports and I thank you.

As a matter of record, I have spent the past few years reviewing my studies of ECT and have just written an extensive review of the problem, which will be published by Raven Press of New York in January as *Convulsive Therapy: Theory and Practice*. In reviewing the extensive literature and assessing the data, it has been possible to develop a reasonable theory of the mode of action of ECT. It is clear that this major treatment is an analog of pharmacotherapy and that its action is not dependent on any of the physical elements of the treatment but purely on the biochemical changes induced in the brain. It has been a surprise to me that the leaders of the Society of Biological Psychiatry and other august societies have shunned this treatment. I have learned much from the assessment and I hope that you will have a chance to look at the volume when it appears.

My best regards.

Sincerely yours,

Max Fink, M.D.  
Professor of Psychiatry