In Response

A Reply to Vaughan

Jack Marr

Georgia Institute of Technology

Vaughan's reply to my article is in part, I believe, a reflection of the imposed brevity of the "On Terms" column. The topic I chose to comment upon clearly merits a far more extensive treatment. My temptation is to respond to his comments with a more lengthy discussion than the initial article, but the extant paper should be able to stand on its own and, after all, his critique reflects what I said and not so much what I didn't say. My general impression is, however, that Vaughan's concerns are somewhat orthogonal to my intent in writing the article.

My principal aim was to stimulate discussion of the issue of spontaneity in behavior and, in particular, the stochastic character of operants. Operants have been distinguished from respondents on the basis of apparent spontaneity. This is an aspect which I believe should be explored much more carefully, both philosophically and empirically. I pointed out that it is unclear whether the emission of an operant is under explicit control of some prior event, which is, in principle, discoverable, or, as Skinner himself has suggested, the operant may be emitted without any prior causal event. It is the latter

possibility that led to the speculations expressed in the article. I in no way wish to discourage those who might choose to search for those elusive events, wherever they might be found. Such a search is unlikely to be the province of a strictly behavioral account, but there is certainly no question that we would learn something through the procedures Vaughan suggests. One would hope, for example, that we could identify some processes that engender *behavioral variability*, which I see as a fundamental adaptive feature of organisms. As behavior analysts we recognize that variability in behavior is an essential element in the shaping of new repertoires, just as genetic variability is the *Anlage* of species generation. In both cases, alterations in the environmental contingencies interact with variation to yield behavioral or evolutionary consequences. We know that genetic variability is primarily due to random processes; what I am suggesting is that behavioral variability might also be due to random processes. It may be very difficult to demonstrate this, but we should not be discouraged or intimidated by the possibility—there are significant precedents in other sciences.