CHAPTER EIGHT

Science and the Single Case

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I must express my gratitude for being asked to participate in this anniversary celebration. The task assigned, a review of "science and the single case," or the continuing saga of the study of the individual, allowed me to reexperience the pleasure I derived in reading Allport's volume (1937) as a graduate student more than 40 years ago. While my present concern is centered in the first and last chapters, I was drawn to rereading the others as well. My impression was that despite the passage of the years, it could still be read with profit by graduate students today. With regard to the scientific study of the individual, the arguments remain timely and persuasive but certainly need retelling in light of our history over the past half-century.

Allport immediately sets the tone of his ideological position by referring to individuality as the supreme characteristic of human nature. He then contrasts this obvious bit of knowledge possessed by the ordinary person to the attitude exemplified in the sciences devoted to the study of life processes that he characterizes as one where "the very existence of the individual [is] somewhat of an embarrassment and [they] are disturbed by his intrusion into their domains" (1937, p. 3).

At the beginning of his last chapter, entitled "The Person in Psy-
psychology," he attributes to the modern point of view (undoubtedly his own) the demand that "psychology expand its boundaries, revise its methods, and extend its concepts to accommodate, more hospitably than in the past, the study of the single concrete mental life" (1937, p. 549). In support of this position, he refers, in a footnote, to the definitions of psychology by Wundt, James, and Titchener, all stressing individuality, although he points out the discrepancy between their aims and their ultimate accounts of mental life. Ironically, this turned out to be largely true of Allport's work as well.

Allport's focus on the individual grew out of an antielementaristic stance. He did not want to study part processes but rather how things common to human kind were ultimately put together in any individual. In this sense, he was influenced by various theoretical positions arising in late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Germany, especially the "Verstehende Psychologie" of Dilthey and later Spranger (emphasizing value or meaning) and also the "personalism" of Wilhelm Stern. The dynamic holism of Gestalt psychology also captured his interest although its relationship to the individual was not clearly drawn until the work of Lewin. Finally, we cannot leave the issue of influence without mentioning psychoanalysis, which had its origin in neighboring Austria. Allport was intimately aware of the tenets of psychoanalytic theory and recognized its potentiality for studying the dynamic patterns of individual psychological existence. However, in this first chapter, he enumerates his antipathy toward the search in psychoanalysis for universal causes, its slavish acceptance of Freud's doctrine, its isolation from general psychology, its "one-sided" interest in the problems of psychopathology, and its overemphasis on the sexual motive and on the power of the unconscious. These unacceptable features kept Allport in an ambivalent posture toward Freudian theory. He certainly could not embrace the psychoanalytic position, especially as it related to the direct impact of early experience on later personality development, nor could he deny the importance of information resulting from the study of "unconscious" mechanisms. His solution, in part, was the doctrine of functional autonomy of motives, which reduced the all-embracing power of the original conditions surrounding drive acquisition. Without question, Allport imparted a clear and persuasive message that stressed the importance of the study of the individual to the growth of the understanding of human nature.

The growing strength of a personalistic position in American psychology by the end of the 1930s was obvious. In addition to Allport's clarion voice, a strong statement for the lawfulness of the individual had been made earlier in a brilliant essay by Kurt Lewin in 1930 enti-