This book by a psychiatrist is directed primarily to his professional colleagues. The author's aim is "to provide sociotherapy as a treatment methodology with a theoretical foundation" (p. XVII). The book consists of exercises in the development of a theory of groups and of the application of this theory to a conceptual model, specifically that of the psychiatric hospital. The author's theory of groups is based on Talcott Parsons' theory of social action, which is emended, elaborated and in part translated into the author's own terminology. While Edelson holds that "there are no single causes in social life, no more important factors, and rarely a choice between bad and good" (p. XV) he assigns "prepotent, independent roles" to ideas in thinking about social life. He thus defines "the cultural system" as consisting of "systems of values and existential non-empirical beliefs, moral and ethical norms, expressive symbols, and empirical scientific knowledge, as well as the concrete objects serving as vehicles of, and transmitting, these" (p. 64). In his summary of the Parsonian theory as that of a system of action he stresses the importance of four sub-systems: adaptation, goal-attainment (consumation), integration and latency. Corresponding to this systems theory of social action with its sub-systems is the Freudian theory of the personality system,
which is also seen as a system of action and one which also involves four sub-systems. These are the id, the superego, the adaptive ego and the ego-ideal. With the exception of the id and with the addition of an executive ego, each of these corresponds to one of the sub-systems of the system of social action. Each results from internalization of object-relations in different kinds of groups, following the sub-systems of the system of social action outlined above. These types of groups and the varying stress given to each are reviewed in the model of the psychiatric hospital. The hospital is seen as a therapeutic community, in which sociotherapy and psychotherapy may and should complement each other. While psychotherapy focuses on the person, the patient, sociotherapy is concerned with the situation in which the patient finds himself, specifically the hospital situation itself, which is considered as a "community." This therapeutic community is then viewed as a social system and analysed in the terms outlined above. Suggestions are made to show how such an analysis may help in the organization of the hospital, in establishing the need for a clarification of the goals of the type of community which is intended and the need to achieve a reasonable amount of consistency in the articulation of goals. The appendix outline the very interesting implications of two orientations to the therapeutic community, that perceiving the program of the hospital as a "patient-centered political organization" versus that conceiving it as "a specialized treatment endeavor." If the staff person misperceives the kind of community he is working in, disaster of varying degree of severity is likely to follow.
We are dealing here with a model of a particular social system, that of the psychiatric hospital. It is, however, not only a conceptual model but also a prescriptive one, in which the author attempts to provide recommendations, on the basis of his analytic categories, for the organization of the institution. The basis for these recommendations is the call for awareness of what is being done, for the explicit formulation of goals, types of groups, etc.