

Book Review

STATISTICS AND PUBLIC POLICY. Edited by W. B. FAIRLEY and F. MOSTELLER. Pp. 397. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company. Price £12.

This book is a collection of 18 articles most of which have appeared previously in different journals. In selecting which papers to include the editors have tried to include works which illustrate the use of a variety of statistical tools in the formulation of public policy.

It is not a book on statistics. Rather it is a book on decision-making and public policy which illustrates the use that data and statistics can play in these fields.

Like so many books written by a number of authors and assembled by an editor it suffers from a lack of logical sequence. Thus one paper, "Does Air Pollution Shorten Lives", assumes a knowledge of the technique of multiple regression analysis whereas the one immediately following it, "Assessing Unknown Numbers: Order of Magnitude Estimation", gives tips on how to guess at data when the required information is not available. Because most papers have appeared previously elsewhere, the manner in which they are set out varies considerably. For example, not all of the papers include a bibliography, and those that do have different systems of linking the individual references with the various parts of the text.

The book does not claim to be a reference book in which the reader can look up a technique for solving a particular problem; in fact it has no index. What it does is to illustrate some of the general problems and pitfalls in the manipulation of data. It is orientated towards the government policy-maker rather than the laboratory scientist.

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