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## On the Border of Poligenic Crime

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Abstract. This article describes one aspect of the environmental contribution to criminal behavior.

In the widest sense of the term, all criminal behavior is environmental because behavior only becomes criminal--as opposed to unethical, immoral, or illicit--when substantive law is constructed by some formal political authority. A postmodern analysis of this observation might yield a clever but unhelpful insight that when there's no law, then there's no crime. Although a satisfying intellectual tour de force in eradicating crime, the insight often self-destructs without ancillary deconstruction when the postmodernist becomes a victim of crime before the analysis or of the behavior that is no longer a crime afterwards.

So perhaps criminal behavior may be more usefully conceived of as generated by environmental aspects that interact in varying degrees with aspects of the individuals who engage in or support crime. And this article posits that all environmental aspects seem to involve a border separating different amounts or kinds of highly valued objects. The border may be physical, psychological, or spiritual. It may be literal or figurative. It may be real or notional. But it must be transgressed for crime to occur.

There are many levels of analysis that can be applied to the border as an environmental aspect of crime. For example, the border may be between two people or peoples (groups, organizations, nations) who differ in anything from salience of physical stigmas, inferred financial assets, social prestige, to strength of character. Formally constituted political authority may have little or nothing to do with the presence of these differences and may find them to be very resistant to modification--especially to leveling in an attempt to prevent or minimize crime.

On the other hand, formally constituted political authority may create the border between differences that may lead inevitably and ineluctably--even if unintentionally from the authority's perspective--to criminal behavior. One example of many might involve Nation-State A that decides to discourage its citizens from smoking tobacco because of health concerns. The policy to discourage smoking comprises a significant tax mark-up on the price of domestic and imported tobacco products as well as an additional customs duty on imported products. A significant portion of the tax mark-up and customs duty are to go to preventative health research and programs as well as secondary and tertiary medical services. Unfortunately, there is a downside as well. Nation-State B is contiguous to Nation-State A and is less health-conscious. It has no tax mark-up of tobacco products. The border between Nation-States A and B now is the vehicle for illegal importing of and black marketing in tobacco products from B to A. Customs officers may be corrupted. The rule of law is weakened.

This is an example of poligenic crime. Just as iatrogenic disease is disease caused by health professionals who are entrusted with the physical and mental health of their constituents, poligenic crime is crime caused by leaders of the polis who are entrusted with minimizing crime among their constituents. Formally constituted political authority has enough on its hands with borders not of its own making to create additional borders that challenge its authority and harm the welfare of its citizens. While there are certainly criminal regimes that can be characterized by exploiting borders whether of their own

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making or not, regimes intent on confronting environmental aspects of crime must focus on removing borders. Fostering citizenship, social cohesion, altruism, some types of community policing, and criminal justice review of policy decisions across the board are just some helpful initiatives that have their own risks of being subverted by still other borders--spontaneously arising and intentionally crafted. (See Kapuscinski, C.A., Braithwaite, J., & Chapman, B. (1998). Unemployment and crime: Toward resolving the paradox. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 14, 215-243; Halfmann, J. (1998). Citizenship universalism, migration, and the risks of exclusion. *British Journal of Sociology*, 49, 513-533; Longshore, D., & Turner, S. (1998). Self-control and criminal opportunity: Cross-sectional test of the general theory of crime. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 25, 81-98; Vila, P. (1997). Narrative identities: The employment of the Mexican on the U.S.-Mexican border. *Sociological Quarterly*, 38, 147-183; Wines, M. (March 1, 1999). The border is so near, the smuggling so easy. *The New York Times*, p. A4.) (Keywords: Border, Crime.)