



# JUVENILE JUSTICE: AMBIGUITY PRODUCES STEREOTYPES

A REJOINDER TO MARY MCAULEY

**Victoria Schmidt**

Mary McAuley is not quite justified, in my opinion, in calling my review hostile. My attitude toward her work does have an emotional component, but it may be more accurately described as one of apprehension. Her reply only strengthened that feeling by revealing further contradictions in her position.

McAuley addresses her work to decision-makers—not just politicians, but also civil society activists, researchers, and journalists. In my review, I noted the dissonance between the way she initially defines her addressee and the concluding paragraph of the work, where McAuley points to the key role of the president in reforming juvenile justice. This impression is only reinforced by McAuley's statement that the book is addressed to a general audience. Is she implying that decisions are only made at a top level? McAuley dismisses my claim that she is disdainful of society. But what role does she assign society? She states that society must become an independent supervisor of the penal system—but can society perform that function and debate the attendant problems if the key decisions on the care of difficult juveniles continue to be made by the government? What are the conditions for society's voice to be heard? This question remains unanswered.

In her reply, McAuley also formulates the problem she studies—delinquent behavior and the fight against it. To frame the problem in this way in the context of a discussion of juvenile justice carries a risk—if only because she uses the obviously stigmatizing and oft-criticized term “delinquent behavior”.<sup>1</sup> Framing juvenile justice as a fight against delinquent behavior practically excludes the option of the restorative model of justice that is so attractive to McAuley, which essentially aims to reconcile the victim and the offender and to make all parties share responsibility.

McAuley denies that she pays tribute to the role of individuals in history, yet she identifies voluntarism as both the blessing and the scourge of Russian politics. This is a convenient attitude toward the government, especially for someone who has worked at a charitable foundation and, like many benefactors, may have viewed an initiative's recognition by the authorities as a mark of success. This attitude allows one to blame the government for failures and to avoid in-depth study of the ambiguous nature of grassroots initiatives.

McAuley's book presents a specific viewpoint. I believe it to be inconsistent, but it may be intelligible to those not familiar with the current debates on models of juvenile justice whose significance McAuley so easily dismisses. I am troubled by the prospect of seeing her recommendations implemented. All the more so since several topics remain unaddressed, such as the ambiguity of public opinion in Russia and the need to analyze the social services' willingness to develop alternatives to incarceration.

I emphatically agree that the culture of debate and reviewing in Russia is lacking. As a case in point, the presentation of McAuley's book at the *Bilingua* club in Moscow in March 2008 resembled a celebration of the author more than an academic discussion, even though the book's publication should have provoked an open and substantive debate. However, McAuley is wrong to contrast my “brutal” critique with a supposedly more

---

<sup>1</sup> In part, this is a linguistic problem. Mary McAuley mentions “errant behavior” in the passage in question. There is no obvious translation for “errant” in Russian, and I rendered this as “deviantnoe povedenie,” a translation expressly approved by McAuley. Whether the terms “errant behavior” or “delinquent behavior” are as charged as “deviant behavior” in this context is, of course, a moot point.—*Translator's note.*

refined Western reviewing culture. To give an example, Graeme Gill, in his review of McAuley's earlier book *Soviet Politics, 1917–1991*, spares no strictures on aspects such as the vagueness of the book's target audience or the failure of the author's explanation of historical conflicts (Gill 1999). Gill argues that McAuley's account of historical events is inconsistent and inadequate. I hope McAuley does not deny me the right to criticize her just as strictly solely on the basis of my citizenship. That irony is not only admissible but indeed desirable in debating controversial questions is argued, for example, by Greg Mayers, a British expert on academic style (Mayers 2004). In Russia, discussions of social problems are often excessively emotional, inhibiting reflection and the acceptance of a multiplicity of views. I therefore thank Mary McAuley for her willingness to engage in a debate which may help everyone involved realize the complexity of the problem at hand.

*Authorized translation from the Russian by Mischa Gabowitsch*

## REFERENCES

Graeme Gill. 1994. Review of: Mary McAuley, *Soviet Politics, 1917–1991*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, in: *European History Quarterly* 24: 456–458.

Mayers, Greg. 2004. *Matters of opinion: talking about public issues*. Cambridge: 2004.