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• In March 1981, "60 Minutes" "reveal[ed] how the most common type of tire rim used on heavy trucks can fly off, killing or maiming tire mechanics and other bystanders." Film showed an exploding rim shredding two dummies, but viewers were not told that the rims' locking mechanism had been shaved off for the test.

• In December 1980, "60 Minutes" disclosed that Chrysler/AMC's small "CJ" Jeep was apt to roll over, "even in routine road circumstances at relatively low speeds." Footage of tests was shown which appeared to support the conten-

tion. Viewers were not told, Olson says, that testers had to put the Jeeps through 435 trials to get eight rollovers. (Chrysler says the repeated skids wore down the tire tread and contributed to the rollover.) Nor were viewers told that the testers had hung weights in the vehicles' corners, inside the body and out of camera view. An investigative engineer at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration later concluded that the tests were of "questionable" validity. The same, it seems, might be said of some TV "news" shows.

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## RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

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### *Robbing Bakhtin's Grave*

"Prosaic Bakhtin: Landmarks, Anti-Intelligentsialism, and the Russian Counter-Tradition" by Gary Saul Morson, in *Common Knowledge* (Spring 1993), School of Arts and Humanities, Univ. of Texas at Dallas, Box 830688-JO 31, Richardson, Texas 75083-0688; "Bakhtin and the Present Moment" by Gary Saul Morson, in *The American Scholar* (Spring 1991), 1811 Q St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), perhaps the leading Russian literary and cultural critic of this century, has suffered a strange fate in America, according to Northwestern University's Morson, co-author of *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (1990). He was hostile to structuralism, Marxism, and some forms of relativism—yet American proponents of these doctrines have claimed the great thinker as one of their own.

Bakhtin, who apparently "spent the better part of his life hiding from the [Communist] Party to escape arrest," wrote a great deal but published very little. Although *Dostoevsky's Creative Art* came out during the 1920s and was a success, Morson says, it was not until a collection of Bakhtin's work "for the drawer" appeared in 1975 that "his range and greatness" was revealed. Various tribes of American academics then began "an intense and unseemly competition" to "package" this new find.

"Despite his unremitting attacks on formalism and structuralism, followers of Roman

Jakobson—who had been active in both groups—initially claimed Bakhtin for both." Then, as structuralism began to fall out of fashion, Morson says, "a new poststructuralist, postmodern, deconstructionist Bakhtin was born. Thus, a thinker who spent his life trying to understand personal ethical obligation was presented as an antinomian or nihilist."

In two essays that Bakhtin wrote about Tolstoy, Morson acknowledges, he did "ape Marxist rhetoric"—but "so unsuccessfully that it is uncertain whether they are merely his worst work or an attempt at parody and oblique political critique." Marxism is conspicuously absent from his early essays on ethics and aesthetics, Morson says, yet Michael Holquist, the editor of most American translations of Bakhtin, "labors [in an introduction to those essays] to render the great thinker acceptable" by giving him Marxist credentials.

Most of Bakhtin's intellectual career, Morson writes, "was devoted to developing the contrast of theory and daily life, of abstractions and particulars, of philosophical systems and what he called 'prosaic intelligence.'" Wary of the narrowness and sense of superiority that often afflict the intelligentsia, Bakhtin belonged instead to a Russian countertradition that included Anton Chekhov. In the eyes of Bakhtin and the countertradition, Morson says, "systems [of thought] at best mislead and at worst justify cruelty in the name of a higher ideal."