

Good dog

MARK ROWLANDS ASKS, CAN ANIMALS BE MORAL?

It is the middle of the night, and two cold, wet noses are pressed against my face. Get up, you negligent parent, say the noses, your son needs you. Sometimes it seems that almost every day, one will see a newspaper report on a tragic incident where mixing children and dogs has gone horribly wrong. Less reported, because far less newsworthy, are cases where such mingling has gone horribly right. Given that the noses belonged to Nina, a grizzled old warrior German shepherd/malamute mix, and Tess, a wolf hybrid with some rather highly developed predatory instincts, I was somewhat concerned about how they would fare, sharing a house with my nascent son. I needn't have worried. Crawled on, dribbled on, kicked, elbowed and

kneaded: these occurrences were all treated with a resigned fatalism. The daily finger-in-the-eye was shrugged off with an almost Zen-like calm. During the year or so that their old lives overlapped with his, I was alternately touched and amazed by the kindness, toleration and patience they exhibited towards my son. Kindness, toleration and patience seem to be moral phenomena. They are forms of what we might call *concern* – emotional states that have as their focus the wellbeing of another. But concern for the welfare of others seems to lie at the heart of morality. If Nina and Tess were acting on the basis of concern then, it seems, they were acting morally.

At this point, there is a word that typically enters the debate: *anthropomorphism* – the

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