

## SANCTITY OF LIFE?

The vast majority of Humanists and atheists reject the idea of 'sanctity of life'. This is because it is a religious notion, based on the belief that God (or gods) created life and, for this reason, life is to be considered holy, sacred, a gift from God. Non-religious people would not accept any idea of God or a higher power being ultimately in charge of their lives or their destiny. Whereas many religious people believe that it is God who has a purpose and plan for their lives, atheists and Humanists believe that they themselves make their lives purposeful and that it is they that control their own destiny. Rather than speaking of the 'sanctity of life', people who do not believe in God will be concerned with the value of life. This does not mean that non-religious people place less value on life than religious believers; those who do not believe in God simply have different reasons for holding life in high regard. Non-religious people place a high value on life, but not because they are compelled to do so because of its relation to a higher being. Instead, they value life because human beings have a natural, in-built concern and compassion for other human beings, living creatures and the natural world.

Charles Darwin described the 'works of nature' as 'clumsy, wasteful, blundering, low and horridly cruel'. This contrasts starkly with the view of most religious believers, that all creation is good, and that the array of creatures that exist on earth are evidence of an intelligent and all-loving designer. Humanists and atheists, whilst appreciating the beauty and complexity of nature, do not believe in a divine creator; they tend to have a more objective and less idealistic regard for life on earth, accepting, as Darwin did, that much of survival in the natural world depends on creatures causing suffering and pain to others.

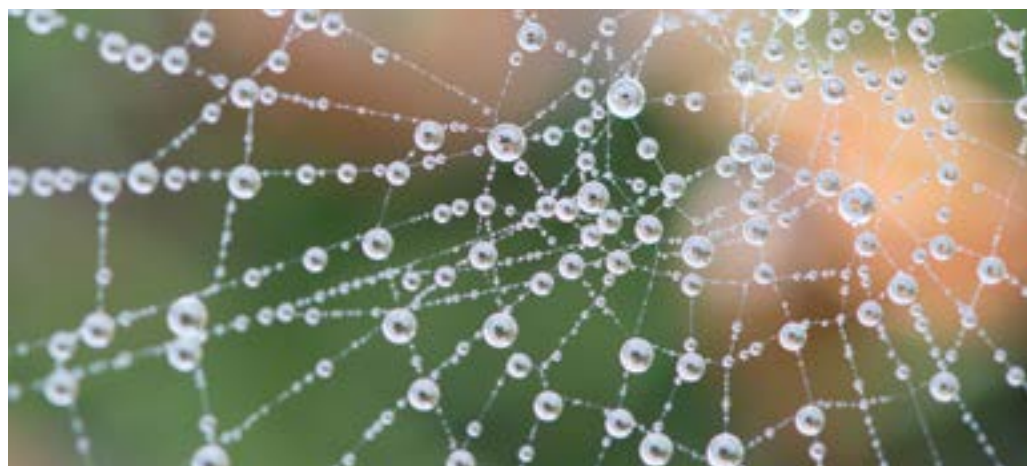
### DISCUSSION POINT

Study the images below. Discuss them, and think of your own examples, of:

- a) evidence in the world of an intelligent, all-loving creator
- b) evidence that the world could not have been created by an all-loving God



**Cat**  
Cat catching a rat; craftvision / gettyimages



**Cobweb**

Cobweb; bearacreative /  
gettyimages



**Doctor**

Doctor; FatCamera /  
gettyimages



**Snowflake**

Snowflake; Marccophoto /  
gettyimages

### WRITE IT DOWN!

Write a paragraph summing up the main points you discussed with your group.

Write a paragraph explaining your own views.

Charles Darwin, Letter to J. D. Hooker, 13 July 1856. In F. Burkhardt and S. Smith (eds.), *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin 1844-1846* (1987), Vol. 6, 178.