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Dewey, significantly, distinguishes two conceits with which religion, in one way or another, has to do—or which, in one way or another, have to do with religion (*Human Nature and Conduct*: 331).

The first he speaks of as "a conceit fostered by perversion of religion which assimilates the universe to our personal desires." My question is whether this conceit isn't essentially involved in what Santayana calls "natural religion," by which he means the kind of religion that "arises in a mind sure of its purposes but incapable of carrying them out unaided." At any rate, just as Dewey can say that this first conceit is fostered by "perversion of religion," so Santayana can imply that "natural religion" is "utterly irreligious," in that it encourages the very thing from which "a veritable religion" would come to redeem us.

The second conceit, according to Dewey, is "a conceit of carrying the load of the universe from which religion liberates us." I have long supposed that what Dewey has in mind by this is simply the failing distinctive of atheism or natural impiety. But while I still think that it certainly includes this failing, I now question whether it is exhausted thereby. For what is it to seek to save oneself, to secure one's existence by what one oneself thinks, says, or does, if not to assume the burden of carrying the universe, instead of allowing God to carry it, of letting God be God? If religion frees us not only from the conceit fostered by perversion of religion, of assimilating the universe to our personal desires, but also from the conceit of carrying the load of the universe, religion, i.e., "*ultimate* religion," frees us from the radical self-*mis*understanding of sin, ignorance, or what have you, that underlies and finds expression in even perversion of religion.

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I have a further reflection on what Dewey means by "a conceit of carrying the load of the universe from which religion liberates us" (*Human Nature and Conduct*: 331).

Some pages earlier he says: "From the standpoint of its *definite* aim any act is petty in comparison with the totality of natural events. What is accomplished directly as the outcome of a turn which our action gives the course of events is infinitesimal in comparison with their total sweep. Only an illusion of conceit persuades us that cosmic difference hangs upon even our wisest and most strenuous effort" (262). It seems clear to me that the conceit referred to in the last sentence can only be the same as the "conceit of carrying the load of the universe." The conceit of thinking that "cosmic difference" hangs upon anything we do, even the wisest and most demanding, is evidently only verbally different from the conceit of thinking that we carry "the load of the universe."

This becomes evident, at any rate, as soon as we avoid supposing that Dewey somehow means to deny that our acts do in fact make a difference to the whole, and, in *that* sense, make a "cosmic difference." He's explicit in saying, "In a genuine sense every act is already possessed of infinite import," and, "When a sense of the infinite reach of an act physically occurring in a small point of space and occupying a petty instant of times [*sic*] comes home to us, the *meaning* of a present act is seen to be vast, immeasurable, unthinkable" (262, 263). So Dewey's point is in no way to deny that our acts make a difference to the cosmos, but only that they can make the kind of difference involved in the universe's continuing to exist and its no longer existing at all.

Recognizing this, however, in no way effects my earlier insight that the conceit in question covers both atheism or natural impiety and the radical self-*mis*understanding of sin in all its forms, including the attempts at self-contrived security, the "wisdom" and the "righteousness," and thus the "boasting," of the "natural man."