When looking for a subtitle summarizing adequately the creative and reflective processes at work in Camus's *Carnets*, I was happy to come upon “Une conscience en action” (*oc* III, 1381). The beauty of the French concept of “conscience” is its twofold meaning: mental consciousness and moral conscience. It never fails to remind us of François Rabelais’s advice that, in a famous letter, he has one of his characters, the giant Gargantua, give to his son Pantagruel. It has become a paradigmatic sentence valid for ever: “Science sans conscience n’est que ruine de l’âme.” For Rabelais, a harbinger of the French Renaissance and visionary, the emerging sciences of his time had to be defined as a combination of skilled and informed knowledge, always inextricably linked to values. In a similar vein, Camus’s actions and writings never ceased to take into account their moral impact. The latter’s transparent application is most succinctly resumed in my favored two words, which function as a crystallizing key sentence, at the beginning of his second philosophical essay, *L’Homme révolté*: “Parler répare” (*oc* III, 68). These two words are preceded by an equally telling succinct statement: “Respirer, c'est juger” (*oc* III, 68). The implied ethical message is straightforward: simple life-preserving actions and words always have consequences. That seems to be, at once, Camus’s point of departure and arrival, the GPS of his complex itinerary for a writer of widely read lyrical essays, plays, and fiction, as an author of influential philosophical essays who nevertheless forcefully rejected the label of philosopher, and, most influentially, who, as an intermittent journalist and brilliant editorialist, stirred up public emotions, first in his native Algeria, and later in post-war France when he provided his contemporaries with inspiring ethically-founded political guidance for the country’s difficult reconstruction.

Whether mental or physical, structured space, that is, the concept of geography in Camus’s imaginary, has many layers of meaning. It can refer to real stations such as countries in which he lived or travelled, but also to simple places in which he played, worked, suffered and recovered, places such as the apartments of his extended families in Algiers and Paris, the streets and the beloved soccer field of his youth, the classroom of his high school and the lecture hall of his university, the various editorial offices both in Algiers and Paris, the
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convalescent homes where he had to stay several times, the deck of boats on which he crossed oceans, the cabins of airplanes that he compared to “un cercueil métallique” (OC iv, 1056), and, above all, the expansive spaces that nature offered him: the desert and the sea. Finally, let’s not forget the cityscapes that he mostly disliked and in one of which, Paris, he spent the greater part of his adult life. These micro and macro physical and mental environments generated, each in its own way, a host of lived experiences that were converted, from the time he put his pen to paper, to promising lyrical essays such as L’Envers et l’Endroit and Noces, his significant first publications. His transformational reactions as an avid young reader are also visible in his first novel with the strange title, La Mort heureuse, that the aspiring writer decided was not good enough to be published in his lifetime. But with an unshakable consistency, Camus’s personal reflections on nature’s healing beauty or the often dehumanizing effects of certain cities, such as Oran, were filled invariably with unmistakable ethical preoccupations. They already contained the nutshells of the philosophical framework that was taking shape and that he would develop later in his two major philosophical essays, Le Mythe de Sisyphe (1942) and L’Homme révolté (1951). An example taken from Noces (1937) reflects one such experiential cornerstone:


OC 1, 137

While already recognizable in his early Carnets entries and his early lyrical essays, henceforth Camus adopted and adapted systematically the same reflective framework in his emerging and soon better known fictional and theatrical works: L’Étranger (1942), the plays Caligula and Le Malentendu during the same war period, La Peste (1947), two more plays in the late forties, L’État de siège and Les Justes, and the self-mocking novel La Chute (1956). It is as if his transparently overarching value system based on lived experiences was compressed in his mental geography to a four-corner foundation of interdependent elementary human values: life, freedom, solidarity and dignity. Their affinity with the Kantian categorical imperative is transparent but not invoked, probably