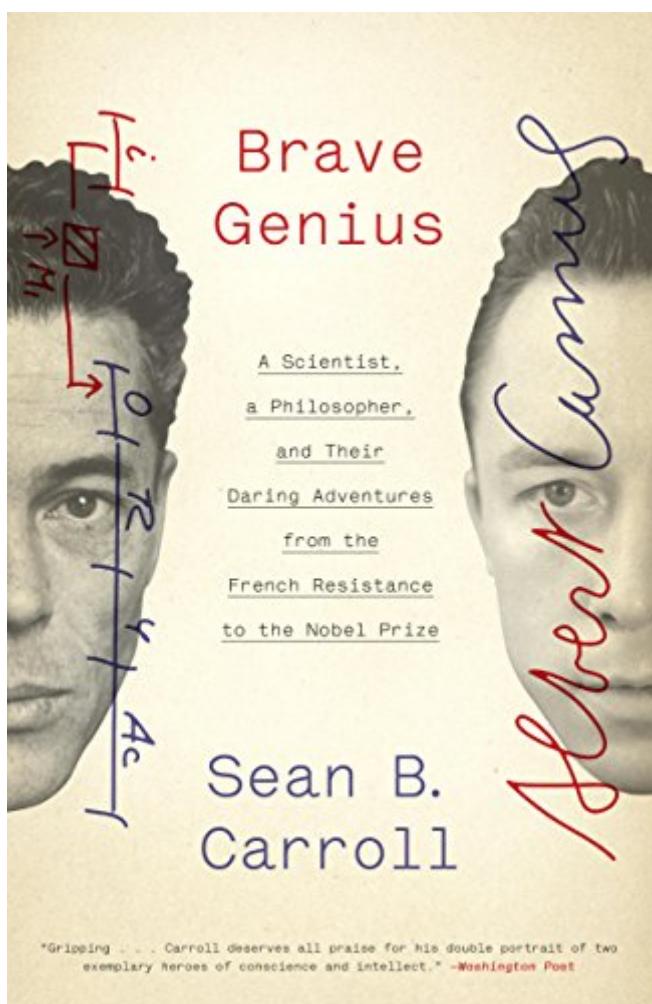


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# Brave Genius: A Scientist, A Philosopher, And Their Daring Adventures From The French Resistance To The Nobel Prize



"Gripping . . . Carroll deserves all praise for his double portrait of two exemplary heroes of conscience and intellect." -Washington Post



## **Synopsis**

The never-before-told account of the intersection of some of the most insightful minds of the 20th century, and a fascinating look at how war, resistance, and friendship can catalyze genius. In the spring of 1940, the aspiring but unknown writer Albert Camus and budding scientist Jacques Monod were quietly pursuing ordinary, separate lives in Paris. After the German invasion and occupation of France, each joined the Resistance to help liberate the country from the Nazis and ascended to prominent, dangerous roles. After the war and through twists of circumstance, they became friends, and through their passionate determination and rare talent they emerged as leading voices of modern literature and biology, each receiving the Nobel Prize in their respective fields. Drawing upon a wealth of previously unpublished and unknown material gathered over several years of research, *Brave Genius* tells the story of how each man endured the most terrible episode of the twentieth century and then blossomed into extraordinarily creative and engaged individuals. It is a story of the transformation of ordinary lives into exceptional lives by extraordinary events--of courage in the face of overwhelming adversity, the flowering of creative genius, deep friendship, and of profound concern for and insight into the human condition.

## **Book Information**

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## Customer Reviews

This is a terrific book! I was recently reading a genetics textbook, where there was an insert about the life of Monod. This propelled me to Wikipedia which then led me to books. The history of the Nazi invasion of Paris/France is well presented. The principle characters, Albert Camus and Jaques Monod, are both heroes and icons. It helps that their philosophy of life is similar to mine. It also helps that I am familiar with all the biology presented which is pretty basic and not more than any layman can grasp. The author does a good job of keeping the story interesting weaving between the existential, the real, and the theoretical. I learned a lot from this reading.

I was very impressed with the breadth of historical coverage that Carroll provided in this book. The man is a scientist and I expected a book mostly focused on science, though including Camus in the book would argue for something more - yes, there's science, and there's philosophy, but on the whole there's a rich combination of all of these things, in addition to a chronicle of the bravery of men and women in a very difficult time (I will admit that my appreciation for the French during this time has been increased by this book) during WWII. I found myself reading the book voraciously. I expected a good read, but I was moving along far faster than I expected as I was gripped by the story and the people therein. Thank you Dr. Carroll for a wonderful book, one that I learned quite a bit from, and for giving me a reason to better appreciate the French people. Yes, they had their Petains, but then they also had the men and women like Camus and Monod, who I think spoke more to the true character of the French people, something I didn't fully appreciate until this book.

This is a long book, over 500 pages. It is a masterpiece of research. It is so detailed that it's difficult to believe the author was not there with Camus and Monod. This is a book who's subject is Camus, the Nobel winning philosopher-writer and the Nobel winning scientist Monod, but there is much more. I have read much about WWII but never have I read the internal story of the fall of France and the rise of Vichy France. The brutality of the Germans and sacrifice of the French resistance. This is followed by the revolt in Hungry against soviet repression. It made me remember the iron curtain. Both Camus and Monod were active in the French resistance. Camus was a gifted writer and philosopher and I loved learning about him and reading his philosophy. Monod, a gifted scientist with little tolerance for religious myth. He was the lead scientist in discovering breakthroughs in genetics. Parts of the scientific work are difficult to get through and perhaps this

could have been condensed a little. After winning the Nobel prize, Monod became a spokesman for science. You will increase your knowledge if you read this book.

This is a fascinating and incredibly entertaining book, despite the heady sounding topics. It was also a brave and ultimately successful gambit to combine what could easily be two books, one about each genius, into this larger but more synergistic whole. It is unfair that Dr. Carroll is, on top of being a fantastically creative and productive scientist, also a great writer and teacher. But it is an unfairness that we can all benefit from. His chance gifts have necessitated his generous productivity that we all get to enjoy!

If you are looking for a thrilling story about real-life Heroes, read this book - though I believe Camus and Monod would not have regarded themselves as heroes. As other reviewers have noted, this book provides a strong narrative about Albert Camus and Jacques Monod as friends and as important Nobel Prize winners in their respective fields, literature and physiology (biochemistry). Carroll also includes a narrative about Monod's fellow prize winners Francois Jacob and Andre Lwoff. That narrative is only the one thread of this book. Another thread recounts how both Camus and Monod embraced communism and later rejected it. A key thread reports their brave, constant and intense life-threatening important work in the French Resistance in World War II. Unfortunately, their contributions to the French Resistance were not widely known or taught when I read *THE STRANGER* in a 1959 freshman university course or later when I read *THE MYTH OF SISYPHUS*. Likewise, the professional and resistance work of Monod also was unknown. But Carroll's real writing strength combines terrific research with an equally terrific narrative to wed biographical, historical, philosophical, and scientific detail to his subject's beautifully explained literary and scientific concepts. For example, the reasons for Camus's disagreement with Sartre builds until their friendship is broken by Camus's principled, well reasoned and uncomplicated statements of denunciation of communism and the atrocities of the Soviet Union. Likewise, Carroll describes Monod's scientific attack on the Soviet pseudoscience promoted on the work of Trofim Lysenko. I cannot thank Sean Carroll enough for writing this book! For me and perhaps for others, this book describes in moving detail what it meant to be a real warrior in the treacherous social and political environment of France after the Vichy government capitulated to Hitler and the Third Reich. Carroll's narrative does not stop in 1945 but continues through to the death of Monod in 1976 (Camus died in 1960) and covers his achievements in biochemistry as well as devising an escape for two scientists from Hungary after the Soviet invasion in 1956.

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