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A Brain Wider than the Sky: A Migraine Diary by Andrew Levy,
Simon and Schuster, 2009

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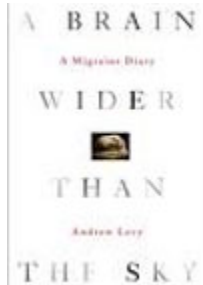
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A Brain Wider than the Sky: A Migraine Diary

by Andrew Levy, Simon & Schuster 2009

Reviewed by Chad Bauman

In this book, recently named one of the best memoirs of 2009 by the *Washington Post*, Andrew Levy attempts to convey the shape, flow, and sensation of migraines to his readers. And in this, he succeeds brilliantly (in the interest of full disclosure, Levy is a colleague of mine at Butler University). Yet Levy's memoir is also about the terrifying privacy of a migraine. Migraine descriptions are metaphorical at best, and migraines are ultimately nontransferable; they isolate and discriminate. Levy explores the damaging effects of this isolation on his psyche, his relationships, and his ability to perform the roles of professor, parent, and spouse. But this very same isolation drives Levy, while suffering through a particularly enervating four months of daily migraines, to begin reading more about the science and history of migraines, as well as about other migraineurs. *A Brain Wider than the Sky* distills that information, mixing and integrating it with a moving narrative of the author's own experiences with migraine.

One in ten Americans are sufferers of migraine, and migraineurs are even well represented among those so famous they require only one name: Jefferson, Marx, Freud, Darwin, Elvis, Nietzsche, and Joan (of Arc). This list, then, makes plain the paradox of migraines-that despite their isolating and debilitating effects, migraines seem somehow, at least for some, a font of inspiration. Levy's departing migraines leave him refreshed, his mind buzzing with potential and urging him to create and connect-to his own mind, to others, to nature. *A Brain Wider than the Sky* is not, therefore, a complaint, but rather an exploration, a meditation, and through it Levy seems to come to terms with his migraines, and even, perhaps, with his own human frailty. So too, I suspect, will many of his readers.

- Chad Bauman is an assistant professor of religion at Butler University.