


SHORT STUDY

Fury or Folly? ἄνοια in Luke 6.11

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Abstract

In Luke 6.11, the scribes and Pharisees are filled with ἄνοια after they witness Jesus' healing on the Sabbath. Modern English translations, beginning with the RSV, translate the word ἄνοια as rage or fury, whereas older English translations render it as madness, and modern German translations follow Martin Luther by rendering the phrase with terms such as *unsinnig* ('wurden ganz unsinnig') or *Unverstand* ('wurden mit Unverstand erfüllt'). This article argues that Plato's explanation of the word ἄνοια in *Timaeus* 86b provides the typical semantic range of the word; it includes ἀμαθία (the folly of ignorance) and μανία (the folly of madness, or the loss of one's rational faculties), but not anger.¹ This twofold usage is reflected in Greek literature from the fifth/fourth century BCE through the fifth century CE, including in 2 Tim 3.9, the only other text in which ἄνοια occurs in the New Testament. To say that the scribes and Pharisees are filled with rage in Luke 6.11, therefore, both exceeds the typical function of the word ἄνοια and risks further dehumanising two groups of people who are too often dehumanised by Christian tradition.

Keywords: ἄνοια; Plato; rage; folly; ignorance; madness; scribes; Pharisees; translation

1. Introduction

In Luke 6.6–11, Jesus heals on the Sabbath. He does so deliberately in the presence of the scribes and the Pharisees, who are watching him to see whether he will do so. Jesus summons a man with a withered hand to stand with him in the middle of the synagogue, and he asks if it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath or to do harm. Jesus then instructs the man to stretch out his hand, and it is healed. The scribes and Pharisees are filled with ἄνοια, and they begin deliberating what they should do to Jesus.

It is easy, instinctive even, to fill in the end of the phrase 'filled with...' with the word 'rage'. Indeed, an earlier episode in Luke 4 nudges the reader to do so. After Jesus reminds his old neighbours gathered in the Nazareth synagogue that Elijah was sent only to a widow in Sidon, and Elisha sent only to Naaman the Syrian, they are filled with rage (ἐπλήσθησαν θυμοῦ) (Luke 4.28). Luke 6.11 uses the same verb but a different noun (ἐπλήσθησαν ἀνοίας). The context could imply that they, like the people in the synagogue at Nazareth, are angry at Jesus and that they are angry enough to begin to plot his downfall, just as the townspeople of Nazareth are angry enough to try to throw him off a cliff.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, translations are mine. I have often retained English translations to show how other translators have understood the word ἄνοια.

This is the interpretation offered by almost every modern English translation of ἐπλήσθησαν ἄνοίας in Luke 6.11.² (It is a judgement not shared by modern German translations; more on that below.)

- filled with fury (ESV, RSV, NRSV)
- filled with rage (Holman Christian Standard, TEV)
- furious (JB, NIV)
- filled with insane fury (J.B. Phillips/Phillips Modern English)
- wild with rage (Living Bible, NLT)
- beside themselves with anger (New English Bible, The Message)
- became enraged (New American Bible)
- filled with senseless rage (NASB)
- filled with mindless rage* (NET)

*The term ἄνοια (*anoia*) denotes a kind of insane or mindless fury; the opponents were beside themselves with rage. They could not rejoice in the healing, but could only react against Jesus (NET footnote).

Yet this is not the typical function of ἄνοια. From Plato in the fifth/fourth century BCE to Procopius in the fifth century CE, the word appears to be used with relative consistency, and it is not used to indicate rage. In their own way, the NASB ('senseless'), Phillips ('insane'), the Message ('beside themselves'), and the NET ('mindless') gesture toward this consistent pattern.

2. Plato's Two Types of ἄνοια

Plato (428/427 BCE–348/347 BCE) provides the explanation of the word that lays the groundwork for subsequent usage: 'We must agree', he writes, 'that folly [ἄνοια] is a disease of the soul; and of folly [ἄνοια] there are two kinds, the one of which is madness [μανία], the other ignorance [ἀμαθία]'.³ One kind of ἄνοια, or folly, is a total loss of reason, a mad irrationality; and the other is what we might (unkindly) call stupidity, or foolishness arising from ignorance.

We can find examples of this twofold usage closer to Luke's time in the Septuagint (mid-third century BCE) and in the writings of Dionysius of Halicarnassus (c.60 BCE–c.7 BCE), Flavius Josephus (c.37 CE–c.100 CE), Plutarch (c.46 CE–c.120/125 CE), and Lucian (120 CE–180 CE). The word ἄνοια occurs several times in the LXX, where it functions as folly (Ps 21.3 LXX), indicates the stupidity of certain animals (Wis 15.18), and refers to a foolish reason or decision (Wis 19.3). The Greek translators of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes both muse on the ἄνοια of the young (Prov 22.15 LXX; Eccles 11.10 LXX). Another proverb compares the ἄνοια ἀφρόνων (the folly of the unwise) to the σοφία πανούργων (wisdom of the crafty) (Prov 14.8 LXX), a theme that Eusebius will echo several centuries later. In the book of Job, ἄνοια indicates a folly or ignorance that springs from unrighteousness or ungodliness (Job 33.23 LXX; for the context see Job 33.16–17 LXX).

In the Maccabean literature, ἄνοια is used to indicate the reckless and rash behaviour of Simon (2 Macc 4.6). As in Job, it is also linked to impiety and ungodliness, and to

² The one exception I have been able to find is Scot McKnight, who translates ἄνοια in Luke 6.11 (and in 2 Tim 3.9) as 'ignorance' (more on this below). Many thanks to McKnight for providing me a copy of his forthcoming translation.

³ Plato, *Timaeus* 86b. English translation in *Plato* (trans. R. G. Bury; London: William Heinemann Ltd; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1929) 233. Benjamin Jowett translates ἄνοια as 'a want of intelligence' (*The Collected Dialogues of Plato, Including the Letters* (ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns; Princeton, 1963) 1206). Robin Waterfield translates it as 'mindlessness' (Plato, *Timaeus and Critias* (Oxford World's Classics; Oxford University Press, 2008) 90). All three translators use 'madness' for μανία and 'ignorance' for ἀμαθία. Even before Plato, Herodotus (c.484 BCE–c.425 BCE) uses the word to indicate an ignorant or mistaken idea (Herodotus, *Histories* 6.69).

opposition to the Maccabean rebels by a former high priest (2 Macc 14.5) and by ‘the ungodly Nicanor’ who died in battle against Judas Maccabeus (2 Macc 15.33). In these occurrences, it functions as a sort of profound folly on the part of those who recklessly align themselves against God’s purpose. It is also used as an insult to describe the foolishness of Auranus (2 Macc 4.40). Twice it is used ironically, when King Ptolemy uses it to describe the foolish defiance of the Jews in their refusal to allow the Egyptians into their temple or accept their benefaction (3 Macc 3.16, 20).

Dionysius, a Greek historian and teacher of rhetoric, followed in the footsteps of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes when he connected ἄνοια to youth; he wrote that such a great folly (τοσαύτη ἄνοια) and infatuation (θεοβλάβεια) possessed some ‘unfortunate youths’ that they wrote ‘letters to the tyrant in their own hand’.⁴

When the Jewish historian Josephus narrated Samuel’s indictment of Israel for their request for a human king, he had Samuel declare:

τίς οὖν ἔσχεν ὑμᾶς ἄνοια φυγεῖν μὲν τὸν θεὸν, ὑπὸ βασιλέα δὲ εἶναι θέλειν;

Therefore, what madness [ἄνοια] possessed you to flee from God and to desire to be under a king?⁵

The Greek philosopher Plutarch mused (via a speech by King Numa), ‘Every change in a man’s life is perilous; but when a man knows no lack and has no fault to find with his present lot, nothing short of madness [ἄνοια] can change his purposes and remove him from his wonted course of life...’.⁶

The satirist Lucian of Samosata, in his dialogue *Timon*, paired ἄνοια with εὐήθεια in a conversation between Hermes and Zeus. Hermes declares that the misanthrope Timon was ruined not by ‘kind-heartedness and philanthropy and compassion’ but by ‘senselessness [ἄνοια] and folly [εὐήθεια] and lack of discrimination in regard to his friends’.⁷

This pattern of usage appears to continue for the next few centuries. For example, Eusebius of Caesarea (c.260–c.339 CE) contrasted returning to a sound mind (εἰς ἀγαθὴν πρόθεσιν ἐπανεέλθοιεν) to being seized with folly (ἄνοια).⁸

In the late fourth century, Jerome rendered the Greek word ἄνοια with the Latin *insipientia* (folly, lack of wisdom), ensuring that the Western church traditions reliant on the Vulgate translation would read (and preach) that the scribes and Pharisees in Luke 6 were *repleti sunt insipientia* (filled with folly). Around the same time, Basil of Caesarea (330–379) wrote in an unaddressed letter about a ‘folly [ἄνοια] and perversity of character’ that leads a person to ‘give no heed to the counsels of others’.⁹ A century and a half later, when Procopius of Caesarea narrated an exhortation to the Persian army, he wrote that because they are ‘men who are bound to die’, it would be ‘extreme folly’ (πολλή ἄνοια) not to choose to die ‘gloriously at the hands of the enemy’.¹⁰

⁴ Dionysius, *Antiquitates Romanae* 5.7.1. English translation in Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *The Roman Antiquities*, vol. 3 (LCL; trans. Ernest Cary; London: William Heinemann Ltd; Cambridge: Harvard, 1940) 20–21.

⁵ Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae* 6.91. See also Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 1.210.

⁶ Plutarch, *Numa* 5.2; English translation in *Plutarch’s Lives*, vol. 1 (LCL; trans. Bernadotte Perrin; Cambridge: Harvard, 1914) 323.

⁷ Lucian, *Timon* 8; English translation from *Timon, or the Misanthrope*, in *Lucian, in Eight Volumes*, vol. 2 (trans. A.M. Harmon; Cambridge: Harvard; London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1988) 335.

⁸ Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 8.17.7.

⁹ Basil of Caesarea, Letter 307; English translation in *Saint Basil, The Letters* (trans. Roy J. Deferrari; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934) 241.

¹⁰ Procopius, *de Bellis* 1.18.28. English translation from *Procopius; History of the Wars Books I and II*, vol. 1 (LCL; trans. H.B. Dewing; London: William Heinemann; New York: The Macmillan Co., 1914) 169.

There may indeed be cases in which the word functions to indicate a kind of insanity accompanied by rage; I have not found them. All the instances I have studied map consistently onto Plato's two tracks: folly born of the complete absence of reason (being out of one's mind) or folly born of ignorance or lack of understanding. ἄνοια is frequently put in opposition to wisdom and right judgement; nor does anger typically precede or follow ἄνοια. The people described with the word ἄνοια are not angry; they are foolish or senseless.

The word ἄνοια appears only one other time in the New Testament, in 2 Tim 3.9, where its function fits neatly into the pattern visible in these other Greek texts:

As Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these people, of corrupt mind and counterfeit faith, also oppose the truth. But they will not make much progress, because, as in the case of those two men, their ἄνοια will become plain to everyone. (2 Tim 3.8–9, NRSV)

English translations, both vintage and modern, uniformly understand ἄνοια in this context as foolishness or ignorance:

- folly (ASV, KJV, RSV, NRSV, NIV, J.B. Phillips)
- lack of understanding (Holman)
- foolishness (NET, NASB)
- fools (NLT)¹¹
- un-wisdom (Wycliffe)

The one minor outlier is Tyndale, who chooses Plato's other track and renders ἄνοια as madness (as Tyndale also does for Luke 6.11).

3. The Shift from Folly to Fury

When John Wycliffe created the first English translation of the entire Bible from Latin into English (1382–1395), he rendered the Latin word *insipientia* in Luke 6.11 as 'un-wisdom' (with a footnote: 'or, folly'). Shortly after Tyndale, when Martin Luther translated the Bible from Greek into German, he took a similar tack, rendering ἄνοια in Luke 6.11 as 'unsinnig' [senseless]: 'Sie aber wurden ganz unsinnig' ['they became completely senseless'] (Luther Bibel 1545).¹² For 2 Tim 3.9, Luther chose the word 'Torheit' (folly).

From William Tyndale in 1526 to the Douay-Rheims in 1899, English translations uniformly chose 'madness' to translate ἄνοια in Luke 6.11, thus opting for Plato's first track: the folly born not of ignorance but of madness, of being driven out of one's mind:

- filled full of madness (Tyndale, 1526; Coverdale, 1535; Geneva, 1560)
- filled with madness (KJV, 1611; Young's Literal, 1862; Revised Version, 1885; Darby, 1890; Douay-Rheims, 1899; ASV*, 1901)

*In a footnote to the ASV: Or, foolishness

The earliest English translation to use 'fury' appears to be the RSV (1952), followed by almost every other subsequent English translation.

¹¹ The Message paraphrases it as 'impostors' and 'frauds'.

¹² Modern German translations follow in Luther's footsteps, using 'unsinnig [senseless]' (Schlachter 1951) and 'mit Unverstand erfüllt [filled with ignorance]' (Schlachter 2000).

The RSV is, of course, a revision of the King James Version and its two successors (the Revised Version of 1881–1885 and the American Standard Version of 1901). What caused the RSV translators to shift from ‘madness’ to ‘fury’? And what led every subsequent English translation to follow their lead? They may have found warrant in one of the lexicons.

4. Lexicons and Commentaries

The lexicons are split: some (e.g., Thayer, BDAG/Preuschen, and Louw-Nida) include anger in their definitions of ἄνοια, whereas others (e.g., Liddell-Scott, Cremer, TDNT, and the new Cambridge lexicon) do not. All of them track closely with Plato’s definition, explicitly or implicitly.

The Liddell and Scott lexicon, from the earliest edition in 1846 to the most recent in 1996, defines ἄνοια simply as ‘want of understanding, folly’; no mention is made of anger.¹³ Hermann Cremer’s 1923 lexicon likewise defines it as ‘Unverstand, Torheit [ignorance, foolishness]’ and quotes Plato’s definition from *Timaeus* 86b.¹⁴ Similarly, the 1964 TDNT (based on the 1933 German version), cites Plato in its definition of ἄνοια as “Unreason,” “folly,” in the sense both of *insipientia* (vg) and also of *dementia*. For ἄνοια in Luke 6.11, the entry explains, ‘the sense is pathological, “they were filled with madness” (at Jesus)’; and for 2 Tim 3.9, it proposes that the word ‘refers to the dreadful folly of errors both new and old’.¹⁵ The new Cambridge Lexicon (2021) also cites Plato’s twofold definition when it offers two possible meanings for ἄνοια: ‘folly, foolishness’ and ‘stupidity (assoc. w. ignorance)’.¹⁶

BDAG (1910–1979) defines ἄνοια as “‘the characteristic of one who is ἄνοος’ i.e., without understanding’. For 2 Tim 3.9, it further defines ἄνοια as ‘folly’; for Luke 6.11, it explains ‘Of angry pers[ons]... they were filled w. fury’.¹⁷ BDAG appears to be following in the footsteps of its precursor, Erwin Preuschen’s 1910 lexicon. Preuschen defines ἄνοια as ‘die Unvernunft [irrationality or senselessness], der Unverstand [ignorance]’. This closely follows Plato’s twofold explanation of ἄνοια, although Preuschen does not cite Plato. For Luke 6.11, however, Preuschen interprets ἐπλήσθησαν ἀνοίας as ‘sie wurden ganz toll Zornigen [they became very angry or furious]’; he cites no text, biblical or otherwise, in support of this reading.¹⁸

Louw and Nida’s 1988 lexicon offers two different explanations for ἄνοια in its two occurrences: ‘lack of understanding’ (2 Tim 3.9), and ‘a state of such extreme anger as to suggest an incapacity to use one’s mind’ (Luke 6.11).¹⁹ Like BDAG/Preuschen, Louw

¹³ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon, Based on the German Work of Francis Passow* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1863) 136; and H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon With a Revised Supplement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996⁹) 145.

¹⁴ Hermann Cremer, *Biblisch-theologisches Wörterbuch des neutestamentlichen Griechisch* (Stuttgart: F. A. Perthes, 1923) 767. Heinrich Ebeling uses the same two words as Cremer in his definition in *Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1913) 36.

¹⁵ Johannes Behm, ‘voέω κτλ.’, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (ed. Gerhard Kittel; trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 962, 963. Some commentaries cite Behm’s entry in TDNT as support for interpreting ἄνοια as ‘mindless rage or irrational anger’ (e.g., Darrell L. Bock, *Luke Volume 1: 1:1–9:50* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994) 531).

¹⁶ James Diggle, et al., eds., *The Cambridge Greek Lexicon* (Cambridge University Press, 2021) 133.

¹⁷ Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 20003) 84, citing as comparison the ‘manuscript reading’ in Papyrus Egerton 2 line 51, but with the restoration ‘[δ]ἄνοια’.

¹⁸ Edwin Preuschen, *Vollständiges griechisch-deutsches Handwörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments* (Gießen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1910) 107.

¹⁹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988) 32.51, 88.183.

and Nida cite no other text to support this definition. Thayer, on the other hand, provides a clue in his use of Plato's definition.

Joseph Henry Thayer's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (1885) gives two different definitions for ἄνοια. For 2 Tim 3.9, the lexicon offers 'want of understanding, folly' and for Luke 6.11, 'madness expressing itself in rage'.²⁰ Thayer cites Plato and Herodotus. Although neither of those texts explicitly includes rage or anger, Thayer appears to have understood Plato's second form of ἄνοια—that is, μανία (madness or loss of reason)—as fury.

Many nineteenth- and early twentieth-century commentaries also understand ἄνοια in light of Plato's first sense: as μανία. But they do not always include anger in their understanding of μανία. For example, W. H. Van Doran (1881) explains in a note that ἄνοια means 'without mind, deprived of reason by either folly or madness'.²¹ Henri Lasserre (1887) comments, 'ils en perdaient la tête [they lost their minds]'.²² Alfred Plummer (1920) describes ἄνοια as 'The phrensy or loss of reason which is caused by extreme excitement', and he explicitly links his definition to *dementia* (μανία) rather than *insipientia* (ἄμαθία) in Plato's explanation.²³ Heinz Schürmann (1969) appears to take the same path when he renders ἄνοια as 'blindem Wahn [blind madness]'; he writes that Luke characterises the Pharisees' behaviour as 'tollen Wahnwitz [great madness]' and cites Plato in a footnote.²⁴

At least two commentaries, well before the RSV, linked ἄνοια to anger, but without appeal to Plato or to μανία. In 1904, Julius Wellhausen first follows the standard German rendering of ἄνοια as unsinnig [senseless], but then describes the 'senseless rage [unsinnige Wut]' of the Pharisees in his explanation of Luke 6.11.²⁵ Similarly, and more bluntly, Hugo Gressmann's 1919 commentary renders ἄνοια as 'blinde Wut [blind rage]'.²⁶

By at least the early twentieth century, a handful of commentaries make an additional move: they cite Plato's *Timaeus* 86b to explain ἄνοια, they choose μανία (Plato's first sense) as the definition of ἄνοια, and (like Thayer) they understand μανία as anger. In 1930, J.M. Creed wrote, 'the scribes were filled with fury'; he cites Plato and explains 'μανία gives the meaning here'.²⁷ Likewise, in the early twenty-first century, François Bovon translates ἄνοια as 'blind fury' and explicitly connects it to μανία in Plato's *Timaeus*.²⁸ And when Joseph Fitzmyer discusses ἄνοια in Luke 6.11, he first explains, 'they were filled with madness', but then he goes on, 'Plato (*Timaeus* 86B) distinguished two kinds of it: *mania* ("madness, fury") and *amathia* ("ignorance")' and concludes, 'The former meaning suits the Lucan context better; it expresses the hardness of the hearts of Jesus' critics'.²⁹

In Michael Wolter's 2008 commentary, he directly addresses and rejects this move. Wolter accepts that Plato's definition provides the basis but argues for Plato's second

²⁰ Carl Ludwig Wilibald Grimm, Joseph Henry Thayer, Christian Gottlob Wilke, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Bros, 1889) 48.

²¹ W. H. Van Doren, *A Suggestive Commentary on St. Luke: With Critical and Homiletical Notes* (New York: I. K. Funk & Co., 1881) 166, 167.

²² Henri Lasserre, *Les saints Évangiles* (Paris: Société Générale de librairie catholique, 1887) 292.

²³ Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke* (ICC; T & T Clark, 1920) 170.

²⁴ Heinz Schürmann, *Das Lukasevangelium, erster Teil, Kommentar zu Kap. 1,1-9,50* (Freiburg: Herder, 1969) 306, 309.

²⁵ Julius Wellhausen, *Das Evangelium Lucae: Übersetzt und Erklärt* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1904) 19, 20.

²⁶ Hugo Gressmann, *Das Lukasevangelium* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1919) 438.

²⁷ John Martin Creed, *The Gospel According to St. Luke: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indices* (London: MacMillan & Co., Ltd., 1930) 85, 86.

²⁸ François Bovon, *Luke 1. A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1.1-9.50* (trans. Christine M. Thomas; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002) 204.

²⁹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke 1-IX* (Anchor; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) 611.

sense: ἀμαθία (ignorance). Wolter renders ἄνοια as ‘Unverstand [ignorance]’, a reaction which he says distinguishes [‘unterscheidet’] the Pharisees in 6.11 from the people in the Nazareth synagogue who reacted in anger (ἐπλήσθησαν θυμοῦ), Luke 4.28.³⁰ In a lengthy note, he continues, ‘Diese Interpretation muss erstaunlicherweise begründet werden, denn in vielen Wörterbüchern und Kommentaren wird ἄνοια nicht mit „Unverstand“ wiedergegeben...sondern mit „Wut“/ „fury“/ „madness“.’³¹

Wolter observes that interpreters arrive at this understanding by opting for the μανία of Plato’s definition, but he objects that ‘Die Entscheidung zugunsten der μανία ist jedoch nicht nur willkürlich, sondern auch falsch, denn in der hellenistischen Umwelt des frühen Christentums wird ἄνοια immer nur im Sinne von ἀμαθία gebraucht’.³²

I agree with Wolter’s assessment, with one friendly amendment. Even if Luke had μανία in mind (the folly born of madness rather than ignorance), it is not clear that μανία often indicates rage. To be sure, if μανία indicates the loss or suspension of one’s rational faculties, this could mean that one becomes subject to one’s passions instead, and anger is certainly a passion. Yet when μανία appears in the New Testament, including in the Lukan literature, it does not indicate anger.

The noun μανία and the related verb μαινομαι are used sparingly in the New Testament. In every case, they indicate someone who is acting in utter irrationality. Like ἄνοια, μανία is contrasted with rationality, truth, and sound judgement. For example, both words are used to describe the charge of the ἡγεμών Festus against Paul: ‘μαῖνη, Παῦλε· τὰ πολλά σε γράμματα εἰς μανίαν περιτρέπει’ (‘You are out of your mind, Paul; so much learning is driving you into madness’) (Acts 26.24). Paul retorts that he is not out of his mind (οὐ μαινομαι) but is speaking truthful (ἀληθείας) words of sound, rational judgement (σωφροσύνης) (Acts 26.25).

BDAG does not include anger in its entry for μανία, explaining it as ‘madness, frenzy, delirium’.³³ Likewise Liddell and Scott define it as ‘madness, frenzy’, ‘mad passion’, or ‘enthusiasm, inspired frenzy’.³⁴ The Cambridge Lexicon gives the basic definition of ‘madness’, expanded as insanity or craziness (‘irrational or mentally impaired behaviour’), frenzy or inspiration (caused by the gods or the Muses), frenzy or a thrill (associated with philosophy), or, finally, ‘fury’ – but ‘of a wind’ rather than of human beings.³⁵ It seems, then, that even the ἄνοια of μανία is not typically associated with rage. Instead, I suggest that its function is revealed by its usage elsewhere in the biblical texts.

5. The Function of ἄνοια in the LXX, 2 Timothy, and Luke 6

The author of 2 Timothy compares certain people’s ἄνοια to that of Jannes and Jambres. The unnamed group of people in 2 Timothy, and the two men Jannes and Jambres, share two key characteristics: they oppose the truth, and they are foolish. Indeed, they are foolish because they oppose the truth.

³⁰ Michael Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) 239.

³¹ Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 239. ‘Astonishingly, this interpretation must be justified, for in many lexicons and commentaries ἄνοια is not translated with “ignorance”...but with “rage”/“fury”/“madness”...’ English translation in Michael Wolter, *The Gospel According to Luke, Volume I (Luke 1–9:50)* (trans. Wayne Coppins and Christoph Heilig; Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016) 257.

³² Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 239. ‘The decision in favor of μανία is, however, not only arbitrary but also false, for in the Hellenistic world of early Christianity ἄνοια is always used only in the sense of ἀμαθία’ (Wolter, *Luke*, 257).

³³ Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 615.

³⁴ Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (1863) 883–4; and Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* (1969) 1079.

³⁵ Diggle, *Cambridge Greek Lexicon*, 1.893.

By the late first century, in a tradition available to the author of 2 Timothy, the two magicians who stand up against Moses in Exod 7–8 had been identified as Jannes and Jambres.³⁶ There is some debate about whether the earliest mentions of Jannes and Jambres refer to them as Egyptian opponents or ‘Hebrew apostates in Belial’s service who were working on the destruction of God’s people from within’.³⁷ Either way, they—like the false teachers of 2 Tim 3—are fools who align themselves against God and God’s truth. The word ἄνοια functions in the same way in the Maccabean literature and in Job, where it describes people who foolishly or ignorantly align themselves against God’s purpose (Job 33.23 LXX; 2 Macc 14.5; 15.33).

In other words, its function in Luke (as in 2 Timothy) appears to be to indicate a kind of irrational or ignorant folly – an ultimately futile foolishness that disregards or opposes the truth and thus opposes God.

6. Conclusion

I propose, therefore, that describing the scribes and Pharisees as filled with insane fury or mindless rage goes beyond the range of how ἄνοια typically functions, and it risks dehumanising two groups of people in Scripture who are all too easily dehumanised.

To be sure, when Luke portrays the scribes and Pharisees as acting out of folly or madness, he is (by implication) accusing them of not understanding God’s purposes and thus of aligning themselves against God (see also Luke 7.30). Nonetheless, I think it matters whether the scribes and Pharisees, in this case, are described as acting out of folly or fury: out of ignorance or irrationality or out of rage. It is understandable that modern translators shy away from the word ‘madness’—a word that was once applied to people with mental illnesses and has rightly fallen out of favour. And it is a short hop and skip in English from ‘madness’ to ‘mad’ to ‘furious’.

When Scot McKnight translates ἄνοια as ignorance, he participates in a longstanding tradition that understood the word in this way. To say that they are filled with ignorance is both to do justice to the typical function of the word and to draw the reader’s attention to Jesus’ prayer from the cross, for even those who plotted his downfall and death: ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing’ (Luke 23.34).

³⁶ Lester L. Grabbe, ‘The Jannes/Jambres Tradition in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and Its Date’, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98 no.3 (1979) 395–6.

³⁷ Johannes Tromp, ‘Jannes and Jambres (2 Timothy 3,8–9)’, *Moses in Biblical and Extra-Biblical Traditions* (ed. Axel Graupner and Michael Wolter; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007) 225, citing CD 5,17–19.