

### **Whistle-Blowing Case Analysis**

Whistle-blowing is a hotly debated topic that has only become more prominent with the expansion of the information age (Shidash, 2012). The increasingly widespread availability of the internet has made communication and information sharing with a considerable number of individuals easier. This increased ability to disperse information has made conversations about the ethics of whistle-blowing more pertinent because a whistleblower can now reach a wide audience without the need for cooperation from massive media organizations. A prominent and recent example of this type of whistle-blowing is the case of Chelsea Manning. In 2010, Manning, a US Army intelligence analyst, leaked sensitive information about US military operations in the Middle East to WikiLeaks, a relatively small organization at the time (Ward, 2017). This leak included a video of a US attack helicopter firing at, killing, and injuring journalists, civilians, and children (Al Jazeera English, 2010). Manning claims she leaked this information because she believed it should be public and could help protect people from being subjected to the brutality of warfare (Ward, 2017). However, this case analysis will demonstrate how virtue ethics shows Manning's actions were immoral and disloyal to the US.

In "Care and Loyalty in the Workplace," Oxley and Wittkower (2011) attempt to redefine loyalty through the lens of care ethics. In particular, they assert that loyalty is not obligatory and cannot be demanded from another person or entity. Instead, loyalty is caring about someone or something enough that one will go further than they are required to ensure the object of care's safety and well-being. Based on an interview with Manning, her primary motivation for leaking information was that she believed the information should be public (Ward, 2017). The desire for the US to change its actions and do better seems absent in her motivations to leak the information. Manning's motivation may have been similar to the sentiment US defense analyst

Ivan Eland pointed out in the documentary video provided for this module. Manning may have leaked the video and information to the public in hopes that it would raise awareness of the unavoidable horrors of war and make the public reconsider support for unnecessary wars that do not impact them (Al Jazeera English, 2010). This motivation would show care for people all over the globe who may be affected by war. If this is the case, the US would not be Manning's object of care, and thus, she was not going above and beyond her duties to the US to make it a better, more just nation. As a result, her actions of leaking sensitive intelligence information did not demonstrate loyalty to the US but rather to humanity as a whole.

Manning's act of whistle-blowing was an immoral one because she potentially endangered US national security without exhausting many, much less all, other possible options to achieve her goal of reducing the tragedies of war. Virtue ethics can be used to analyze her decision to leak classified information and show how she could have acted differently to produce a similar or greater beneficial outcome. For instance, Manning could have exhibited temperance and wisdom to realize that she was young and inexperienced at the time and could have waited to take action. By restraining her desire to make an immediate change, she could have used her position as an intelligence officer in the military to learn more about the workings of war and use this knowledge to make more significant future impacts. Furthermore, by resisting the temptation to illegally whistle-blow, Manning could have shown commitment to the cause of preventing unnecessary war by becoming more knowledgeable and avoiding making herself ineffective by losing her freedom to prison or reputation damage. Instead, being committed to making a long-term change could have allowed her to dedicate her entire life to more effective advocacy rather than a single whistle-blowing incident that seemed largely ineffective.

An example of how Manning may have been more effective as an advocate would be by promoting the work of journalists. The fact that a Reuters reporter and cameraman were killed in the Collateral Murder video Manning leaked is evidence that journalists were risking their lives to cover the very situations that Manning wished to unveil (Al Jazeera English, 2010). If Manning had not leaked information and stayed in the military to obtain a more senior intelligence position, she likely could have used her expertise in the military intelligence community to promote the work of warzone journalists and inform the public of the horrors of war. If Manning had obtained such experience, she could have been better able to convince the public that the atrocities showcased by journalists are a reality of war without endangering US national security. The public would be likelier to believe the scenarios journalists cover are common in war if Manning were a seasoned expert on the subject matter who could vouch for their credibility (Funk et al., 2019).

In “Whistle Blowing and Rational Loyalty,” Vandekerckhove and Commers (2004) propose a new perspective on loyalty known as rational loyalty. Rational loyalty entails that there must be a specific object of one’s loyalty, and said object is not physical in nature. Instead, to use an organization as an example, the object of an individual’s loyalty should be measurable or attainable, such as a mission statement or code of ethics, instead of employees or the company itself. Furthermore, Vandekerckhove and Commers claim that whistle-blowing can be justified as an act of loyalty when the object of loyalty is an attainable ideal. If an organization begins to stray from its mission statement, an employee can demonstrate loyalty to the organization by whistle-blowing to help steer the organization back on the track of fulfilling its public mission.

In Manning’s case, her object of loyalty would have been the US Army’s mission statement, which is “to deploy, fight, and win our nation’s wars by providing ready, prompt, and

sustained land dominance as part of the joint force of all U.S. military” (U.S. Army, 2023).

According to Vandekerckhove and Commers’s (2004) ideas, this mission statement should have been her object of loyalty because she swore an oath to uphold it when she enlisted in the Army. Furthermore, loyalty is the first of the Army’s core values that are listed under the mission statement on its website (U.S. Army, 2023). The Army’s core values state that loyalty entails dedicating oneself to the US Constitution and their comrades. However, Manning’s actions and motivations do not demonstrate loyalty to the US when examined using the principle of rational loyalty. Manning’s motivation to leak sensitive information appears to be that she wanted to protect humanity from being unnecessarily subjected to the horrors of war (Ward, 2017). While this may be a noble goal, the Army’s mission clearly states that its goal is to win wars in which the US is involved. Leaking confidential information about military strategy, movements, and actions could have a detrimental effect on this mission because such information could put US adversaries at an advantage during warfare (Mohammed & Landay, 2023). Manning should have known this, given that she ran predictive analysis within the military (Davies, 2022). When discussing her job in the Army, Manning points out that the algorithms the US uses to predict adversarial armies’ movements can be used just as effectively to predict US military actions. If the leaked information could be used to predict future US strategies, it could undermine the US Army’s mission to win wars and could potentially put the lives of soldiers at risk. As a result, Manning’s actions would have been disloyal to the Army and the US. Furthermore, Manning’s act of whistle-blowing could be seen as immoral from Vanderckhove’s standpoint because it was not motivated by upholding the ideals of the mission statement she was sworn to uphold and could have ultimately inhibited it.

Virtue ethics can also be used to analyze Manning's decision to leak sensitive information concerning the commitments she made while in the Army. Manning freely chose to join the Army, which included taking an oath to uphold its values and properly discharge her duties for the duration of her enlistment (Military.com, 2023). Even if she discovered aspects of the US military she believed to be unjust, Manning should have demonstrated commitment and temperance by holding herself accountable to her decisions and completing her service in the Army dutifully. Once her initial enlistment expired, she could choose not to reenlist and redirect her effort and loyalty to a cause she supports. This commitment to seeing her obligations through could also demonstrate generosity toward the movement she decides to join because she would have greater expertise and potentially be more effective at advancing its agenda. However, this does not mean that Manning could reveal sensitive information once the military no longer employs her. Manning had a security clearance in the Army (Lexie, 2021). One stipulation of a security clearance is that one must keep classified information they are exposed to secret for the rest of their life unless they are explicitly granted permission to release it (Burgess, 2020). In her career after the military, Manning would still need to be virtuous and demonstrate commitment to the agreement she made when accepting a security clearance. Manning could demonstrate extraordinary wisdom, temperance, and commitment if she could use her expertise to further a cause she is passionate about while still upholding the agreements she made in the past.

Manning's decision to leak sensitive video and documents about US military action was both immoral and disloyal to the US. Manning seemed to lack many aspects of virtue that would have helped her make a moral decision in her situation, such as commitment, wisdom, and temperance. If Manning had used the knowledge gained from her position in the intelligence community and considered that journalists were already reporting on the war, she could have

realized that whistle-blowing was a major threat to US national security and unnecessary to help others. Additionally, based on the ideas and definitions of loyalty discussed, Mannings's actions were not loyal to the US because her object of care was not the US (Oxley & Wittkower, 2011). Some may object to the notion that Manning's actions were not loyal to the US because a shift of public opinion could ultimately benefit the US. Public pressure could cause reform in the US military to make it a more just organization while still pursuing its mission successfully. Furthermore, the US may be less likely to engage in unnecessary conflicts, thus endangering the lives of fewer soldiers. However, even if the US were to experience such benefits from the leak, her actions were still not loyal to the US because her actions were guided by the desire to benefit humanity, not the US specifically. Some may also argue that it would have been immoral for Manning to stand by while witnessing the murder of civilians and children. If the US military were to hide this footage, those killed would likely never receive justice because the public would be none-the-wiser. However, Manning could have initially attempted to address this issue through less drastic measures. Manning could have waited until the end of her enlistment and then promoted the warzone reporting of journalists.

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