

Whistleblowing and Loyalty Through a Virtue Ethics Framework

Manning released footage, taken in 2007 during the Iraq War, of an Apache helicopter firing on suspected combatants and civilians. In this footage, the U.S. military is shown to be following the rules of engagement and withholding fire until they suspect an individual is seen with an RPG, which was capable of taking down the helicopter they were in. However, their commentary during this event brought suspicion to them as they appeared to be treating the cost of human lives flippantly, even begging for an injured man to pick up a weapon so they could fire on him and kill him. This was further cemented when more footage released showed zero regard for a civilian walking in front of a building when they made the decision to fire on that building. He was not even acknowledged before he and the building were fired upon, with the gunner celebrating the resulting explosion. Through this, there comes into question whether the American military members were following virtue ethics, and further questions of if Manning followed virtue ethical principles by releasing the footage of their actions. Ultimately, however, I believe that it can be argued that Manning did showcase a version of loyalty to the U.S. and that her actions were a moral case of whistleblowing.

Vandekerckhove argues that loyalty to an organization does not conflict with the act of whistleblowing. They argue this through the idea that one's loyalty to an organization does not mean going along with every decision, but rather is based in loyalty to the values promoted by that organization. When the organization strays from these values, then whistleblowing is necessary to bring the organization back into alignment with them, thereby showcasing greater loyalty than any other action.

Through this framework, Manning's actions can be analyzed. It can be assumed that her organizational loyalty was to the U.S. government. The American government promotes the

values of democracy and rule of law. When it appeared as though the American government was breaking the laws and deceiving its democratic values by covering up such acts, she became a whistleblower and released the footage of these events. This is not seen as a betrayal to the American government, but as an action supporting its core values. Her actions ultimately seem successful in that the U.S. government then proceeded to make moves to right the wrongs committed and voters were informed of what their representatives were condoning, giving them the opportunity to voice their disagreement.

Through the framework of virtue ethics, it can also be seen as Manning committing a morally correct act. In virtue ethics, one must strive to make the right decision at the right times for the right reasons. In this, it has already been argued that Manning made the correct decision to become a whistleblower. What is less certain is whether or not she acted at the right time or for the right reasons. Did she hold onto the footage and wait to release it until a time that would be politically advantageous for a party she supported? Or did she release the footage as soon as she was able to? The timing of her actions must be known for there to be a true assessment of her committing a fully moral act under the virtue ethics framework. Further, her reasoning behind her actions must also be known. Did she align with the values of loyalty expressed in Vandekerckhove's argument, or did she choose to release the footage for selfish reasons? Without this information, one can only lean towards believing she did the morally correct thing under virtue ethics through the implications and results of her actions. The American public was resultingly informed and able to put pressure on the government to change course and tactics in the Iraq war. An argument can then be made that she encouraged further loyalty, a desirable trait, to American values in the American people.

In the essay by Oxley and Wittkower, loyalty is discussed through the lens of business and care. The notions of care and loyalty are not two separate entities, but they are intertwined and interdependent. An employee that feels as though their organization cares about them tends to be loyal in turn. This mutual understanding often leads to increased care on the part of the employee towards the business. This notion of care is what enables most employees to go above and beyond in their duties. Additionally, it is found that those who have this loyalty to an organization often have mirrored feelings to the organization that they would have towards someone they care for in their personal life.

Through this framework, it can be understood that Manning may have had this kind of view and relationship both towards the American government and towards the civilians affected by the American government's actions. It can be assumed that Manning cared about the values put forth by the American government and believed it to embody these values. When it failed to live up to expectations, rather than having a divorce in viewpoint, Manning can instead be viewed as having treated the situation like a friend in spiral who needs to be brought back from the precipice through peer pressure. Likewise, Manning likely had a sense of care for the civilians killed as well as their families who were impacted by their deaths. Many individuals are adverse to viewing violence towards any human beings, not just their own family members and friends, based on that shared identity of being human. Manning is very likely to be one of these individuals. As such, Manning likely wanted to help the civilians and their families in the only way she could which was by releasing the footage of their deaths. There was no way to put pressure on the American government or fundraise if no one was aware of what had occurred.

In virtue ethics, loyalty and care can both be seen as virtues that should be embodied. Virtue ethics also calls for individuals to mirror the actions of other, prior virtuous individuals.

As such, Manning embodied care and loyalty through the act of whistleblowing as there were many that came before her who also were whistleblowers who imparted positive change. These previous whistleblowers were dedicated to a certain cause, showcasing loyalty. But further, many of them were dedicated to preserving human life, showcasing the foundation of care that loyalty is built upon. When Manning released footage to the public about wrongdoings committed, she mirrored the actions of her virtuous predecessors, thereby making her act and her person both virtuous.

To conclude, through the virtue ethics framework, it can be argued that Manning did the morally right thing when choosing to become a whistleblower. Virtue ethics emphasizes doing the right thing, which is informed by following the virtues of those who come before and act virtuously themselves. Manning had a choice between keeping silent and sharing information. This sharing of information was done in a way that showcased utmost care and saved human lives as well as leading to support for the families of those who were unfortunately lost. To apply this to wider circumstances, this can showcase that whistleblowing does not have to be a costly act, that it can be done with care and that it can save far more people than it hurts. This also showcases that whistleblowing is not born out of disloyalty, but rather the highest forms of loyalty born out of genuine care.