

Ethan Weber

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Case Analysis 5.4

In 2010, a video taken from a US Apache helicopter was released showing the helicopter firing on a group of civilians that were suspected to be involved with Iraqi insurgents. The footage was released on the internet by Australian based website WikiLeaks, which is famous for leaking conspiracies and controversial material. One of the main information sources WikiLeaks used is Chelsea Manning, a former Army soldier who released over 400,000 classified documents to WikiLeaks about the Iraq war, including the video seen in “Collateral Murder”, which showed American soldiers attacking a group of who they assumed were terrorists, but were actually a camera crew and civilians, including children. In releasing the documents, she was court-martialed and sentenced to 35 years in prison, but had her sentence commuted by Barack Obama in 2017. In this analysis, I will argue that virtue ethics shows us that Manning did not act out of loyalty to the United States, and that her actions were a moral case of whistleblowing.

In Vandekerckhove and Commers’ paper “Whistle Blowing and Rational Loyalty”, they discuss it is much harder for people to feel loyalty towards the professional aspects of their lives, and that people are much more likely to blow the whistle on the wrongdoings of their employers over blowing the whistle on something that is going on in their personal lives, essentially people are more willing to throw their career away for the greater good, rather than throwing something more important to them away. This can be applied to virtue ethics through what our employers do for us other than pay us. And the answer to that is that they do not do much other than pay us. It can be argued that our livelihoods rely on our careers due to the fact that living costs money, but for the common person with the salary they receive, money does not often outweigh morals, which does not capture loyalty the way it would to the people at the top of the company pyramid.

This notion can be applied to Chelsea Manning and the leaked documents she gave to WikiLeaks, as she saw that what the US was doing in the Iraqi war was more important for people to know over her personal freedom and career. She knew that leaking what she did would get her court-martialed, but she leaked the documents anyway. In her experience, the United States’ actions outweighed what they did for her, therefore cultivating an environment where she could not develop any loyalty towards the government and their actions. From a standpoint of virtue ethics, we can see that the loyalty Manning felt towards the truth of the situation greatly outweighed any loyalty she had for the United States and her career. In this day and age it can be seen that sometimes representing the ideas of virtue ethics does always get treated like a virtuous act, even when it is.

And that idea can be seen in how Manning was treated after she blew the whistle, yes, she did technically break the law. But she was immediately detained, court-martialed, and was

almost given the death penalty for what she did. The swiftness of the actions taken showed people just easy it is for someone to be thrown in prison for exposing something bad. Manning did the right thing in the right situation for the right reasons, she believed that blowing the whistle on all the things that the United States was doing in Iraq were not the virtuous acts we were being told about and shown, but that there were some major mistakes and oversights made by the people in command, which got a lot of innocent people injured or killed. The United States has made a lot of bad choices when it came to the Middle East, but trying to cover them up and feed us false narratives will only make people trust the government less when the truth finally comes out. Which in turn will cause more whistles to be blown, since the government is not cultivating an environment that will produce loyalty in its personnel.

In Oxley and Wittkower's paper *Care and Loyalty in the Workplace*, they explore the type of environment needed to create loyalty to the workplace. Early on in the paper they bring up a basic concept for loyalty, that loyalty is created in a place where care is traded equally from both parties, essentially if a workplace cares for their workers, then the workers will care for the workplace. But each side is giving the other different things, the workers are giving their effort and labor, but what the company has to bring needs to bring is much more conditional. Things like comfortable workspaces and salary are a given, but I believe that workers should hold the companies they work for to a higher standard. A great way to decide if you should care about someone is to watch how they talk about and treat other people. You would not want to care about someone who is rude to the people in service of them, such as a waiter or cashier, that kind of behavior is not something that people want in their lives. And that should be applied to the workplace, if you were to see your company talking bad about or treating customers poorly, then you would not care about the company, you would see them as rude and apathetic. You would be willing to throw them under the bus at the drop of a hat. This can be applied to the Manning and Wikileaks situation too.

Manning saw how her organization was treating other people, how they were willing to shoot at the drop of a hat. And that did not create any loyalty in her, she felt as if she was a gear in a machine that hurt innocent people, and that if a gear stopped working, it would just be replaced with another gear who is willing to keep the machine running. Looking through the lens of virtue ethics, we can see that what she did was not made as a quick decision, what she was doing was essentially treason, and she knew that she needed to be willing to give up everything, her freedom, her career, and her public image. But acting ethically can involve breaking the rules. She knew that she was not just helping the American people, in blowing the whistle she was helping people around the world by exposing what was going on. She can very much be compared to Edward Snowden in this case. He gave up everything when the NSA files because he felt it was the right thing to do, the exact same way Manning felt when she decided to leak the documents. Manning and Snowden both were willing to give up the lives they had in exchange for the truth to be where it needs to be, in the public. Government secrecy only develops distrust for these organizations, yes, the outrage that would be directed at the government would be huge, but if they brought their shortcomings to light themselves and put it out there that they messed up and how they would fix it, the road to trust and loyalty would be a lot smoother than it is right now. Looking at Manning's actions through the lens of virtue ethics, it can be seen that she knew

that she had to leak the documents, the idea of keeping people in the dark was not something she wanted to be apart of, and she realized that acting ethically and being morally good in this case can not be restrained by law, so even though she was doing something technically illegal, she knew she was still doing the right thing.

In conclusion, Chelsea Manning did the right thing with the situation she was given. She knew that what the government was doing was wrong, and that if the world wanted to move forward, she would need to expose what was going on. Distrust for the government is commonplace in our society, but that could change. Manning realized that her actions would lead to her imprisonment, but she knew that doing the right thing does not always mean following the law, sometimes the law needs to be broken for the truth to come out. If Manning did not need to break the law to show the truth, and if the government just told the truth themselves, then trust and loyalty would be more likely to develop, rather than having to deal with a resurgence in distrust every time a whistle gets blown. In order for loyalty to our country to be a widespread thing, the government needs to stop hiding what they do and bring the information that the people deserve to light when they happen. But loyalty cannot be achieved until that avenue of information is opened as soon as possible.