

## **Introduction**

The WikiLeaks video "*Collateral Murder*" presents a disturbing depiction of a US army helicopter engaging and firing upon a group of individuals in Iraq, including unarmed civilians and independent journalists (Al Jazeera. 2010). Chelsea Manning, a former US Army intelligence analyst, played an instrumental role in leaking this classified footage to the public. Manning's actions thrust her into the spotlight questions regarding her personal loyalty to the United States and the ethical dimensions of whistleblowing. In this Case Analysis, I will analyze the circumstances surrounding Manning's release of the video and examine whether her actions were motivated by loyalty to the United States. I will also assess the morality of Manning's whistleblowing actions, considering the ethical frameworks proposed by scholars such as Vandekerckhove, Oxley, and Wittkower. Finally by analyzing Manning's actions through the lens of contractarianism, I aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the ethical implications of her actions. All this to say that, in this Case Analysis, I will argue that Manning did not act out of loyalty to the United States and that her actions constituted a moral case of whistleblowing.

## **Vandekerckhove**

In Vandekerckhove's work on whistleblowing ethics, a central concept is the notion of organizational loyalty versus loyalty to wider society or what they call rational loyalty. Vandekerckhove argues that employees often face a dilemma between their loyalty to their employing organization and their loyalty to broader societal values, such as transparency, accountability, and the public interest. Whistleblowing, in this context, becomes a manifestation of loyalty to wider societal norms and values rather than blind allegiance to one's employer. Vandekerckhove also emphasizes the importance of organizational culture and the role it plays in shaping employees' perceptions of loyalty "The organization depends on their loyalty." (Vandekerckhove 2004). When organizational cultures prioritize secrecy, hierarchy, and protecting reputation at all costs, employees may face significant barriers in acting on their loyalty to wider societal values through whistleblowing.

Applying Vandekerckhove's concept to Manning's situation, we can see that her actions in leaking the video can be interpreted as a display of loyalty to broader societal values of transparency and accountability. Despite potential repercussions from her employing organization, the US Government, Manning chose to disclose information that she believed was in the public interest, thus prioritizing societal loyalty over organizational loyalty.



Manning's decision to expose the video can be viewed as consistent with the principle of consent and rational agreement. She acted based on her own judgment and assessment of the situation, not under coercion. Manning made a deliberate and informed choice to disclose information she believed was morally imperative, reflecting her autonomy and agency in the decision-making process. Manning's disclosure of the video can be interpreted as serving the objective of promoting the common good. Contractarianism holds that moral principles should aim to benefit society as a whole. By revealing potential wrongdoing and promoting transparency and accountability within the military, Manning's actions contributed to the public's awareness and facilitated discussions about ethical conduct in warfare. Her whistleblowing served the broader interest of promoting justice and preventing harm, aligning with the principle of advancing the common good.

Additionally, Manning's whistleblowing can be seen as consistent with the principles of fairness and impartiality. She sought to hold the military accountable for its actions regardless of personal consequences. Manning's actions were not motivated by personal gain or vendetta but rather by a commitment to justice and the greater good. Her willingness to confront institutional wrongdoing demonstrated a commitment to fairness and impartiality in upholding ethical standards. Assessing Manning's actions using Vandekerckhove's framework alongside the lens of contractarianism, we can argue that Manning acted morally in whistleblowing. By prioritizing societal values over organizational loyalty, Manning fulfilled her duty to promote the common good and uphold principles of justice, thereby justifying her actions from an ethical standpoint.

### **Oxley and Wittkower**

Oxley and Wittkower focus on the ethical dimensions of whistleblowing within the context of organizational loyalty and duty. One central concept from their work is the idea of the moral duty to blow the whistle when faced with wrongdoing within an organization. They argue that employees have a moral obligation to disclose information about unethical or illegal activities, especially when such actions threaten the well-being of others or violate fundamental ethical principles.

Another key concept is the notion of organizational loyalty as a reciprocal relationship between employees and their employing organization. Oxley and Wittkower suggest that organizational loyalty is contingent upon the organization fulfilling its own moral obligations to its employees and society. When an organization fails to uphold its end of the moral contract by engaging in harmful or unethical behavior, employees may be justified in blowing the whistle to hold the organization accountable.



In applying Oxley and Wittkower's concepts to Manning's case, we can understand her actions as driven by a sense of moral duty to expose wrongdoing within the military. Manning believed that the actions depicted in the video, namely the killing of unarmed civilians and journalists, were unethical and flagrant violations of principles of justice and human rights. She perceived these actions as egregious atrocities that warranted public attention and condemnation. According to Oxley and Wittkower, individuals have a moral obligation to blow the whistle when confronted with unethical or illegal behavior within their organization and according to Oxley and Wittkower "a central issue of business ethics is whether employees should be loyal to the corporation itself" (2011). This duty stems from a commitment to upholding fundamental ethical principles and preventing harm to others. Manning, motivated by her ethical convictions, felt compelled to disclose information about the incidents portrayed in the video, despite the potential personal risks involved.

By leaking the video, Manning sought to fulfill her moral obligation to disclose information about these atrocities, even at great personal risk. She recognized the importance of transparency and accountability in addressing such grave violations of human rights and believed that the public had a right to know about the actions of the military. Manning's decision to blow the whistle can thus be seen as an expression of her moral duty to confront injustice and advocate for accountability within the military establishment. Assessing Manning's actions through the lens of Oxley and Wittkower's framework, we can argue that she acted ethically in whistleblowing. Manning's disclosure was motivated by a sense of duty to prevent harm and uphold ethical standards within the military. Thus, her actions were justified as a necessary response to organizational wrongdoing and a fulfillment of her moral obligations as a whistleblower.

## **Conclusion**

In this Case Analysis, we have examined the WikiLeaks video "*Collateral Murder*" and Chelsea Manning's role in leaking it through the lenses of whistleblowing ethics, particularly focusing on the perspectives provided by Vandekerckhove, Oxley, and Wittkower. Manning's actions raise profound questions about loyalty, duty, and ethical responsibility within organizational contexts. Through Vandekerckhove's framework, we observed that Manning's decision to leak the video can be interpreted as a display of loyalty to broader societal values of transparency and accountability, rather than blind allegiance to her employing organization. Manning's whistleblowing was an expression of her loyalty to the principles of justice and the common good, justifying her actions from an ethical standpoint.



Oxley and Wittkower's concepts highlighted Manning's moral duty to blow the whistle on wrongdoing within the military and the reciprocal nature of organizational loyalty. Manning's disclosure was an ethical response to organizational misconduct, driven by a sense of duty to prevent harm and uphold ethical standards. Manning's actions in leaking the "*Collateral Murder*" video can be seen as both morally justified and ethically necessary. By prioritizing societal values over organizational loyalty and fulfilling her moral duty to disclose information about wrongdoing, Manning acted in the public interest and contributed to greater transparency and accountability within the military.

While Manning's whistleblowing sparked controversy and faced criticism, it ultimately served as a catalyst for important discussions about the ethical responsibilities of individuals within organizations and the role of whistleblowing in promoting accountability and justice. Manning's case underscores the importance of ethical decision-making in challenging circumstances and the need to uphold principles of transparency, accountability, and the common good in the face of institutional wrongdoing.



## Works Cited

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