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Case Analysis on Whistleblowing

The provided video titled “Collateral Murder?” discusses a situation from 2007 that involved the countries of the United States and Iraq. During this time, the United States military began receiving news of automatic gunfire inside the city of Baghdad. In response to this report, the United States dispatched Apache helicopters to the area. There had been previous intelligence given to United States commanders that many of the citizens were armed with automatic assault rifles. The pilot of one of the Apache helicopters could see a man on the ground brandishing, what they thought to be a weapon, towards the soldiers. The Apache helicopter was then given the green light to open fire on. This action resulted in the death and wounding of the men. This included two journalists because a camera was mistaken for an RPG. In this Case Analysis I will argue that Ubuntu ethics shows us that Manning did act out of loyalty to the United States, and that her actions represent a moral instance of whistleblowing.

The first article that I will use to support my argument comes from an article written by Wim Vandekerckhove titled “Whistle Blowing and Rational Loyalty.” The first concept from this written work that applies to Manning’s situation is the concept of bilateral loyalty (Vandekerckhove, 2004). Vandekerckhove explains that loyalty must be shown both ways between two parties in order for loyalty to be expected. Manning showed loyalty to her country by releasing the video of the Apache killing civilians. Although the release of the video brought the United States military under scrutiny, her actions allowed United States citizens draw their own conclusion of the incident. In this way, Manning was showing bilateral loyalty between citizens of the United States and herself. This concept related directly to Ubuntu ethics. Ubuntu ethics is centered around humanity and always acting in the best interests of humanity at large. To do this, one must become more human and act accordingly. From their actions and the conversations between the soldiers, it is clear they were acting with little humanity. Defenders of the soldiers even acknowledge this in the video and make the excuse that this all happened “under the fog of war” with adrenaline pumping. Manning, on the other hand, showed her humanity by trying to get justice for the dead civilians. Innocent bystanders, some of which were children, were senselessly killed in the attack. By exposing the video recorded from the gun turret on the Apache helicopter, Manning demonstrated strong Ubuntu ethics. She also showed how the soldiers acted against Ubuntu ethics. It could be argued that Manning did not show loyalty to the United States military with her actions. However, another concept from Vandekerckhove’s article shows that she was just in her actions. Vandekerckhove also explains a concept known as rational loyalty. In this explanation, Vandekerckhove describes how individuals should be loyal to their superiors based on their organization’s mission statement. The mission of the United States military is to defend the United States against threats both foreign and domestic. These soldiers involved in the incident in Baghdad were not following this mission statement. They killed civilians who posed no threat to the United States. By disregarding their mission, Manning owed no loyalty to the United States military. Had the United States military acted with more restraint, they would have acted more in line with their mission statement. Only then would Manning owe them loyalty. Again, Ubuntu ethics can provide more insight into this concept. Ubuntu ethics emphasizes that the right actions in situations are those made with community in mind. Ubuntu ethics also stipulate that freedoms are given because of recognition by the community. After the video was released, there were mixed opinions. Some viewed Manning as a traitor and demanded that she be arrested. Others saw Manning as a hero who wanted to expose the truth of the incident. What matters most in this situation was Manning’s true intentions. Manning wanted the public to know the whole truth of the events that transpired that day in order for the public to be able to form their own opinions. Manning’s actions were directly in line with Ubuntu ethics and the concepts discussed by Vandekerckhove.

The next article I will use to support my argument comes from Julinna Oxley and D.E. Wittkower. In their written work “Care and Loyalty in the Workplace”, they discuss a few concepts that apply to Manning’s whistleblowing situation. The first concept from “Care and Loyalty in the Workplace” that applies to Manning’s situation is the idea that an individual’s loyalty to directly related to the relationship which they have with the other person or group (Oxley & Wittkower, 2011). This is an easy concept to understand. It means that a person’s loyalty is as strong as their relationship with the other person is. Again, one might argue that Manning’s loyalty should lie with the United States government. However, Manning took a vow that her loyalty lies with the citizens of the United States. Manning demonstrated this strong relationship with the American people. She showed loyalty by accepting any consequences that may arise due to her actions. Manning risked receiving serious criminal charges for her actions to honor her relationship with the American people. Her actions, once again, heavily reflect Ubuntu ethics. Ubuntu ethics repeatedly emphasizes the importance of community and oneness. Similarly to Oxely and Wittkower’s points, Ubuntu ethics also holds that strong loyalty centers around the closeness of relationships. Manning undoubtedly had close relationships with others in the military. She undoubtedly was conflicted about sharing the details of the events that transpired. She chose her relationship with citizens over a few relationships with her colleagues. This displays true Ubuntu ethics by following the path that serves the many over a few. Manning did just that. Oxely and Wittkower also explain the concept that true loyalty requires an individual to do more than what is asked of them. Doing the bare minimum to satisfy someone does not show full loyalty. Instead, they must go above and beyond the call of duty. Manning most certainly did this with her actions. When a person signs up to join the military, they are dedicating a part or sometimes their whole life to their country. This is true in Manning’s case. However, she went above and beyond to serve her country by revealing the truth of what happened in Iraq that day. Although some may not agree, she did more than what was required of her in order to fulfill her oath and show where her loyalty lies. Ubuntu ethics reinforces this idea when it describes how loyalty is solidified through apathy. By truly understanding and relating to the plights of others, strong relationships can be formed. Manning related to the loved ones of the deceased people. She knew what happened wasn’t right and the outrage there would be if this happened in the United States. She also related to the American people by not wanting them to be misled. Governments have misled their citizens before. This is where the term “whistleblowing” originated from. Manning did not want citizens to be misled again. Her actions directly reflect both Ubuntu ethics and the points made by Oxley and Wittkower.

Throughout this analysis, strong points have been made to argue that Manning’s actions were ethical. What happened in Iraq that day was a tragedy. Manning saw that and felt the need to let the world know what actually happened that day. Through the written works of Wim Vandekerckhove, Julinna Oxley and D.E. Wittkower, it is clear that Manning acted with the best intentions. She did what she felt was right not only for the deceased individuals and their families, but also for the American people and the world. By drawing parallels between concepts from Ubuntu ethics and Manning’s actions, it is clear to see that Manning’s actions were ethical. Manning did what was good for the world as a whole and not just for the few. Manning attempted to make a positive impact by letting the world decide if what transpired that day was acceptable or not. Since this incident, a lot of policies in the United States military have changed. This is especially true for the terms of engagement. Manning’s actions had a direct impact on these changes. Whistleblowers like Manning are vital to making sure that powerful groups remain in check.

Reference

Vandekerckhove, W. (2004). Whistle Blowing and Rational Loyalty. Journal of Business Ethics, 53(1/2), 225–233. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25123295>

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