

5.4 Case Analysis

Introduction

The video titled “Collateral Murder”, which was released by WikiLeaks in 2007, shows a leaked tape taken from a United States Apache helicopter patrolling the city of Baghdad. The video reveals graphic information about how the U.S. military gunned down what they thought to be enemy insurgents. However, the victims of the incident were misidentified and turned out to be a group of civilians, including two news journalists, and some rescuers who wanted to help the wounded. Within these killings, disturbing commentary from the Apache crew can be heard in the background and it’s as if they feel a sense of accomplishment from slaughtering innocent people; it can be compared to the same language people use when they play video games. Watching the situation from the sidelines, Chelsea Manning, a former U.S. Army soldier, handed all recordings to WikiLeaks to expose what she saw as wrongdoing by the U.S. Military. In this case analysis, I will argue that virtue ethics shows us that although Manning didn’t act out of loyalty to the United States, her actions were a moral case of whistleblowing.

Discussion of first article

One of the key concepts explained in Vandekerckhove and Commers’ article, “Whistle Blowing and Rational Loyalty”, is the idea of “rational loyalty”. According to the article, “the object of rational loyalty is not the physical aspects of the company – buildings, executives, boards, hierarchies, colleagues – but the explicit set of mission statement, goals, value statement and code of conduct of the organization which is judged as legitimate” (Vandekerckhove and Commers, 2004, p. 229). This means that the concept of loyalty should not obligate the person

under an organization's set of rules to follow it blindly. Instead, something like "rational loyalty" suggests the person to think critically about what is right and wrong and staying true to the mission statement, or in this case, ethical principles. It would be important to do so even if that means going against your superiors, which is exemplified by Chelsea Manning. Manning shared classified government information to the public, exposing all the ethical implications that came with the video including the civilian casualties and war crimes. She chose to reveal this information in order to stand up for her ethical values because she knew what she was seeing was wrong. In the documentary that interviews Julian Assange, editor of WikiLeaks.org, he analyzes the leaked tape and explains that modern aerial warfare is treated like a video game. As we see in the video, the crew of the apache helicopter is looking for any excuse to engage in an attack and when they do so, they are praised with sayings such as "Good shoot'n" or "Oh, yeah, look at those dead bastards" (WikiLeaks, 2010). Through the audio alone, it projects a serious ethical issue and sparks controversy. Manning's decision to whistleblow was done out of the sense of care for humanity and her desire to reveal the injustices made by the U.S. military. With these reasonings, it would align with the concept of rational loyalty as she acted in ways that would put justice and morals first, rather than her devotion to the army.

Through the concept of rational loyalty, it is clear to the viewers that whistleblowing in this situation would morally be right. Although some people may argue that her actions put the nation's security at risk, the information she leaked was important for the public to know. Manning states that "There were two worlds... The world in America, and the world I was seeing [in Iraq]. I wanted people to see what I was seeing" (Shaer, 2017). It is because of her actions that we know about the abuse of power that can occur in military expeditions. From the perspective of virtue ethics, Chelsea Manning's actions were valid. Virtue ethics emphasizes on

the intentions of a person and their character. It argues that a person who acquires such virtues will naturally make good decisions. The U.S. Army follows the acronym LDRSHP for their ethical values: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. Manning developed these virtues well and put them first before her superiors, further exemplifying rational loyalty.

Discussion of second article

In Julinna Oxley and D.E. Wittkowers' article, "Care and Loyalty in the Workplace", one of the main arguments they discuss is that loyalty should be a form of care. They state that "Care ethics provides a useful framework for examining the nature of loyalty defined as a commitment to some person or thing in virtue of one's care and concern for it..." and that if it were a form of care, "...it can be understood within the context of interdependence and personal relations." (Oxley and Wittkower, 2011, p. 224). Here, they are suggesting that loyalty should be seen as an expression of care, rather than a commitment to the organization they are associated with. Also, that loyalty stems from interdependent relationships, where people rely on and support each other. This simply means that loyalty is more than just following rules. Instead, it is about acting out of the good of your heart to benefit the people you care about. In this instance, loyalty can be considered driven by morals, rather than a responsibility.

With the implication that loyalty is a product of care and that it stems from ethical reasoning, Oxley and Wittkower introduce a concept called "critical loyalty"; a similar concept to that of Vandekerckhove and Commers' idea of rational loyalty. In the article, critical loyalty can be described by "seeking to reform the corporation's practices so that they tend toward genuine moral flourishing" (Oxley and Wittkower, 2011, p. 236). This means that it would develop based on the individual's care for their relationship with said corporation. This puts a

focus on mutual flourishing between both the individual and corporation, a little different than Vandekerckhove and Commers' approach with rational loyalty which puts more focus on justice rather than the care for employee to employer relationships.

Regarding our case analysis of Chelsea Manning, some qualities that come from critical loyalty tie into her actions of whistleblowing the US Army. Oxley and Wittkower argue that whistleblowing can be an act of critical loyalty in the beginning of their article, stating "it is also possible for an employee to be loyal to a corporation and examine the way whistle-blowing can be an expression of critical loyalty" (Oxley and Wittkower, 2011, p. 222). Manning's motivations for whistleblowing was not necessarily driven by the desire to put the US government at risk. Instead, she had more care for the ethical values they were supposed to uphold. By watching the carelessness to those ethical values, she acted in the manner of critical loyalty, wanting to restore the organization's practices with the values they state to have. By applying virtue ethics along with the idea of critical loyalty, I would say that Manning's decision to whistleblow demonstrates her personal courage and integrity to do the right thing. It also supports the idea that what she did was moral, considering she prioritized all of the ethical values before the organization itself. Although she may not salvage her career relations, her efforts come from her virtuous character and it spoke out against wrongdoing.

Conclusion

In conclusion, applying virtue ethics alongside key concepts from both Vandekerckhove and Commers, as well as Oxley and Wittkower, shows why Chelsea Manning's actions were morally justified. Virtue ethics emphasizes the importance of moral character and how they put their virtues first over the rules and consequences they may face. These of which Manning demonstrated in her decision to whistleblow. Through the concept of rational loyalty, it explains

that Manning prioritized justice and accountability over her “obligated loyalty” to the US Army. Similarly, Oxley and Wittkowers’ idea of critical loyalty suggests that her actions can be stemmed from her care for the values the army upholds (LDRSHP). Some may argue that Manning’s actions put her career and the nation’s security at risk. While she may have ruined the trust she had with her superiors, it is important to recognize that her motivations came from a place of morals in order to expose the systemic wrongdoing.

References:

Julinna Oxley, D.E Wittkower. (2011) "Care and Loyalty in the Workplace"

Matthew Shaer, New York Times. (2017) "The Long, Lonely Road of Chelsea Manning"

WikiLeaks. (2010) "Collateral Murder"

Wim Vandekerckhove, M.S. Ronald Commers. (2004) "Whistle Blowing and Rational Loyalty"