

The *Collateral Murder* video by Al Jazeera English examines the 2007 Baghdad airstrike, leaked by U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning to WikiLeaks in 2010. Julian Assange, founder of WikiLeaks, argued that without whistleblowers, public discussion would be impossible and noted the crude remarks by the pilots, likening their reactions to a video game score. The leak led to monetary compensation for the wounded children. U.S. defense analyst Ivan Eland highlighted the brutal environment soldiers operated in, where actions were partly driven by personal safety rather than strict military orders. In this video, however, the pilots were shown to respect the chain of command by requesting permission to fire with each instance. A 2007 U.S. military investigation cleared the soldiers of wrongdoing. Namir and Saeed were seen with individuals that had weapons, such as the mistaken rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) launcher and AK-47s. Apart from these two Reuters journalists, another uninvolved woman was killed due to gunfire sweeping across the area. The U.S. rules of engagement (ROE) prohibited firing on wounded individuals, but the pilots engaged a van assisting the injured, believing it to be aiding insurgents. The ROE also allowed targeting entire buildings if a single gunman was positively identified, leading to missile strikes on structures with non-combatants and a public roadway. In this Case Analysis, I will argue that Rawlsian contractarianism shows us that Manning's actions did not show loyalty to the United States, however, was a moral case of whistleblowing.

Vandekerchove and Commers discuss employees' ethical obligations when they witness wrongdoing in their organization in *Whistleblowing and Rational Loyalty*. A key concept they introduce is rational loyalty, which distinguishes between blind obedience to an employer and a rational commitment to ethical principles. Whistleblowing is justified under rational loyalty when employees expose misconduct to protect the public interest rather than solely advance

personal grievances. They argue that whistleblowing can express rational loyalty when it seeks to correct wrongdoing rather than undermine authority. A rationally loyal employee does not prioritize an organization's reputation over ethical obligations but instead holds the organization accountable to its professed values and societal duties.

Manning's decision to leak the *Collateral Murder* video can be viewed as a conflict between irrational and rational loyalty. The U.S. military expected loyalty through adherence to classified information policies and obedience to the chain of command. However, under Vandekerckhove's framework, this expectation aligns more with irrational loyalty, demanding silence even in the face of ethical concerns. On the other hand, Manning demonstrated rational loyalty by prioritizing transparency and public awareness over strict adherence to military secrecy. She believed that the public had a right to know about the civilian deaths and the conduct of U.S. forces. The fact that the *Collateral Murder* video spurred public debate, accountability discussions, and even compensation for the wounded children suggests that her whistleblowing served a higher moral purpose. However, rational loyalty does not automatically justify all forms of disclosure. Vandekerckhove and Commers also emphasize proportionality, meaning that whistleblowers should disclose only what is necessary to address the wrongdoing. While the *Collateral Murder* video was directly related to exposing military actions, Manning also leaked thousands of classified documents beyond this specific incident. This raises ethical concerns about whether the broader leaks were proportionate to the wrongdoing she sought to reveal.

Rawlsian contractarianism assesses fairness through the veil of ignorance, where individuals are unaware of their own status in society. Under this framework, justice is defined as fairness, meaning that ethical actions should be evaluated based on whether they create a more

just society for all, not just for those in power. According to Rawls, a just society would protect whistleblowers who exposed injustices in addition to the least advantaged in society while maintaining reasonable national security interests. Manning's actions, in this view, were morally justified because they contributed to a more just and informed society, aligning with Rawls' principle of fairness. While she did violate U.S. laws and military policies, the injustice of suppressing civilian casualties and dehumanizing military behavior outweighs the duty of absolute secrecy. From a Rawlsian standpoint, permitting secrecy that enables systemic harm would undermine the legitimacy of state authority, which is only just if accountable to the moral reasoning of free and equal citizens. Rawls supports civil disobedience in cases where legal structure perpetuates injustice and blocks reform. If rational loyalty compels one to correct institutional wrongdoing, and all internal options are blocked, whistleblowing becomes a legitimate extension of civil disobedience.

In "*Care and Loyalty in the Workplace*," Julinna Oxley and D.E. Wittkower argue that workplace loyalty must be reframed through care ethics rather than traditional hierarchical loyalty. In traditional models, loyalty is often understood as obedience to authority, discouraging dissent and prioritizing the institution's goals regardless of consequences. However, Oxley and Wittkower suggest that genuine loyalty arises from relational care, including attentiveness, responsiveness, and responsibility to the needs of others. This model of loyalty recognizes that ethical obligations extend beyond one's superiors to include those affected by the organization's actions. Care-based loyalty is reciprocal and contextual, responsive to ethical concerns, and encourages systems where individuals can raise concerns safely.

Applying Oxley and Wittkower's care-based framework to Chelsea Manning's actions reveals that her whistleblowing was an expression of care for those harmed by institutional

actions and for the integrity of the institution itself. From the perspective of care ethics, Manning's actions reflected attentiveness to the suffering of those harmed and responsiveness to a lack of institutional transparency. While traditional models would characterize her as disloyal to the military, the care ethics approach reframes her actions as loyalty to a broader ethical obligation: to the public's right to know, to the civilians harmed, and to the values of justice and accountability that institutions claim to uphold. This analysis also highlights the ethical shortcomings of the institution itself. Oxley and Wittkower emphasize that a just workplace should foster environments where ethical concerns can be raised without fear of retribution. In such a context, whistleblowing becomes a morally driven act of care when internal loyalty is compromised by ethical neglect.

A just society is built on principles agreed upon under a veil of ignorance using Rawlsian contractarianism. Individuals should design fair rules of society without knowing their own position. Individuals would prefer institutions that are transparent and accountable and protect those who reveal institutional wrongdoing in good faith. Manning's actions align with these Rawlsian principles. First, the disclosure promoted the principle of equal fundamental liberties by fostering public discourse and enabling democratic oversight of military actions. The public cannot hold institutions accountable if essential information is hidden. Second, the principle of fair equality of opportunity is violated when civilians are targeted or harmed without due process or verification. Manning's leak revealed how the military's rules of engagement enabled unjust harm, allowing society to reevaluate those policies in pursuit of fairness. A society designed from the veil of ignorance would implement mechanisms to protect whistleblowers and allow them to report injustice safely. The lack of such mechanisms in the military system, combined with the severity of the wrongdoing exposed, justifies Manning's decision to leak the video

externally. While her actions defied formal rules, they upheld the deeper moral commitments of justice, fairness, and care for human dignity. Ultimately, both care ethics and Rawlsian contractarianism support the view that Manning's whistleblowing was not an act of disloyalty but a moral intervention driven by ethical concern. The act exposed institutional shortcomings and served the interests of a just and informed society.

Under Rawlsian contractarianism, Manning's whistleblowing regarding the airstrike was morally justified, as it exposed information that a fair society would want to be made public. A truly just society would ensure that institutions foster transparency and accountability rather than suppressing information that affects public discourse. Fairness must first come at the institutional level, ensuring individuals have the freedom to choose their own paths. Contractarianism would provide affected individuals with the opportunity to make informed decisions about their own security, governance, and moral responsibilities. If individuals behind the veil of ignorance were to design a fair society, they would likely create whistleblower protections that safeguard those who are exposed to unethical behavior. Manning's case highlights a systemic failure in providing institutional mechanisms for ethical concerns to be addressed, internally or by a third party, without extreme personal risk. By failing to create such pathways, the system itself pushed Manning toward actions that, while legally condemned, remain ethically defensible under Rawlsian principles.