Jacob Doerr

Brody Roberts

Marshall Eddy

CS 230

WikiLeaks: The Podesta Emails

WikiLeaks is a media organization that exposes information regarding war and corruption. It is a released library of censored information that is intentionally hidden from the public eye. In March of 2016, WikiLeaks released an email chain involving the democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, and many others. These emails contained sensitive information regarding nuclear energy, and affairs with foreign governments “donating” money to the Clinton foundation for her shady dealings with them. In our essay we will analyze the actions of WikiLeaks, specifically in this case. We will do so by comparing them to our ethical theories to test the morality of this leak.

[Virtue Ethics]

WikiLeaks and Julian Assange have slowly grown to become a big hacking group that dives specifically into hacking to influence politics and has become a major topic on the ethics of their hacking this presidential election. The Virtue Ethics Theory states that “A right action is an action that a virtuous person, acting in character, would do in the same circumstances. A virtuous person is a person who possesses and lives out the virtue. The virtues are those character traits human beings need in order to flourish and be truly happy. This theory can be directly applied to the podesta email leak from WikiLeaks. We first need to look at the actions of WikiLeaks and determine if they were something that occurred because of an individual's goal and potential to influence or if it actually came from a place of morality.

Morally good people will consistently do what is right and it becomes second nature to them and not only act in a particular way but feel a particular way too, in such a way that personal opinion is overlooked for things like politics. If we look at WikiLeaks history we know they have leaked information on people from both sides of the political spectrum consistently, and mostly drop the information as soon as they can, not based on pre-planned timing. Based on this we can say that the people who work at WikiLeaks are morally consistent people who look to expose truth all across the board.

Now that we can say the personnel dumping the podesta leaks are morally consistent, what makes their actions virtuous? For that we have to make sure we understand the leaks and what they are tied to. The podesta emails showed a connection between Clinton and wall street that most of the general public had been worried about but the Clinton Campaign had been downplaying the whole election. Not only did certain wall street ties get revealed, so did some pages of her transcripts for speeches that had been marked by her campaign as “politically problematic”. The emails had revealed that Clinton essentially had been playing a two faced game with a public position and private position on multiple important policy issues. Using the Virtue Ethics Theory we can say that the WikiLeaks hackers had discovered a trove of lies about wall street and wanted to share the truth about it with the voters who should know what's actually going on, they were following their virtue of honesty in just wanting the truth about her policy flip-flops to get to the people who should hear it.

[Kantianism]

The idea of politics is a rather controversial topic, especially when talking about ethics and what some people do to try and attempt to sway the American people to vote for a particular candidate. WikiLeaks has released confidential emails about both parties, so it is clear that WikiLeaks does not have a particular political party they wish to support, but more of a journalist point of view that they want to release the truth. More specifically they want to give journalists information that would be impossible for them to obtain without a third party leaking said information.

The question, is what they are doing moral, is something we can analyze and make a decision using the ethical theory of Kantianism. Kantianism states that one should act only from moral rules that you can at the same time will to be universal moral laws (Categorical Imperative - First Formulation), and to act so that you always treat both yourself and other people as ends in themselves, and never only as a means to an end (Categorical Imperative -Second Formulation). Based on the second formation of the categorical imperative of Kantianism, we can say WikiLeaks is in the right. However, we can not know their true intentions, but we can certainly make a solid assumption based on their actions.

WikiLeaks has been known to leak information that people seem to think is there, or are making assumptions about what the contents of said information actually are. It seems to me that WikiLeaks essentially just gives people what the are asking for, they release the truth. Since their are no signs that WikiLeaks has a particular political party they like to support, then we can assume that they are not releasing this information for their own personal agenda, but rather to allow people to know the truth, which in the case of this 2016 election, is needed. Considering there is a lot of speculation about both candidates, and people are aware of Hillary Clinton’s private server, just not of the contents. So, people made assumptions and rumors got spread. Then WikiLeaks comes in and puts the rumors to rest with facts.

One could argue that WikiLeaks invade Clinton’s privacy and that their action of releasing her personal emails was wrong; however, if anything, WikiLeaks helped Clinton by hurting her. For example, let us say that no one knew of Clinton’s private server and thus, no one knew made speculation about what the emails she sent were on it. If WikiLeaks leaked the emails then, it would have seemed unnecessary and a personal attack on Clinton, but that was not the case. WikiLeaks released the information when people were rumoring about the emails and talk of the emails revealing treasonous information spread throughout America. So, WikiLeaks did what Hillary should have done to put the rumors to rest. Legally WikiLeaks is in the wrong, but morally they are certainly in the right.

[Rule Utilitarianism]

Let’s evaluate the actions of these WikiLeaks members as a whole to come up with a rule. Starting with the statement, “If Wikileaks.org leaks information purposely kept private by organizations (or individuals), they should make this information available to the public.” Given this rule, we can discuss who would benefit from this rule and who would be harmed by it.

I will start with who will benefit from this rule. First and foremost, the seemingly biggest group, the general public would benefit from it. In the case of the Clinton e-mails, these leaks involve a presidential candidate. This is someone who is on the ballot that Americans have the option to vote for. It greatly benefits the public to be more informed on who they are voting on to run our country. The country itself benefits from having a more capable or appropriate candidate. It allows the US to have a better leader and therefore will be better off in the end.

The leak on Hillary Clinton also benefits the Republican Party, along with other third party options. With unethical information that comes out against the face of the Democratic party, it lends itself to an increase of popularity for the others running against her. Perhaps they change from one major party to the other, or voters may even search out a third party candidate.

Now for those who are harmed by this rule. The obvious would be the Democratic Party and all its members as a whole, those involved with that leak, and democratic supporters in general. The democratic party is less likely to win the presidency due to these leaks. The individuals who this leak is about will be harmed by ways of exposing unethical business practices or whatever else. And those voters who truly believe in the democratic morals and ideals will be harmed.

In total, it seems that the majority of the people benefitting from this rule outweigh those who are harmed.

[Act Utilitarianism Perspective]

This judgment will be similar to the case with rule utilitarianism. I’ll start by making a pros and cons list.

Pros:

Public views the true dealings of our candidate

The US can make a more informed vote

Government is scared/checked by the law

Cons:

Politicians don’t have all the freedoms they want

Democratic Party/supporters

Third party of the email is exposed

As we can see, the majority of the people involved are benefitting from this leak. The only ones who don’t are the ones doing the bad thing, or those who support the person (or group) doing that bad thing. To conclude, this leak is overall doing more good than bad, making this leak a moral action.

-Conclusion

From what we have discussed, it seems like the actions of WikiLeaks is considered moral. This of course being specified to the Podesta emails. These leaks have been shown to have virtuous intent. They are considered moral through the formulations of Kantianism, and the leaks of the emails have also been demonstrated to do more good than bad.