

2022-2023 Middle School Ethics Bowl Case Set

To learn more about this event, please visit:

<https://www.ethicsatkentplace.org/student-programs/middle-school-ethics-bowl>

Cases Written by the Writing Committee:

Ayushi Wadhwa (middle school student), Ben Who (high school student),
Claire Cherill (high school student), John Rockwell (middle school teacher),
Juliet Schwartz (high school student), Matt Ferguson (committee
member), and Sonia Nikhil (middle school student)

And edited for final approval by the Middle School Ethics Bowl

Executive Committee:

Ariel Sykes, Deric Barber, Dustin Webster, Erik Kenyon, Karen Rezach, Matt
Ferguson, Michael Vazquez, and Roberta Israeloff

Case 2: Freedom of Tweet

On April 14, 2022, Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla and SpaceX, offered to buy Twitter, a popular social media platform that allows users to share short messages — known as tweets — to a wide audience. Although many lively and important discussions take place on Twitter, it also hosts a fair share of hateful comments. Company policy states that: “We have a zero tolerance policy against violent threats. We prohibit content that wishes, hopes, promotes, incites, or expresses a desire for death, serious bodily harm, or serious disease against a group or individual.” Twitter also reserves the right to ban users who repeatedly violate this company policy. Some users believe that this policy violates people’s right to free speech.

Elon Musk voiced this concern when asked why he invested in Twitter: “I believe in its potential to be the platform for free speech around the globe, and I believe free speech is a societal imperative for a functioning democracy. Twitter needs to be transformed as a private company in order to meet this need.” Elon Musk wants the current limits on what users can say on the platform to be changed.

Those who embrace Twitter’s no tolerance policy against hate speech point out that a person’s freedom of speech ends when it creates harm or the possibility of harm. Many think that the right to free speech does not give you permission to yell “Fire!” in a crowded theater when there is no fire. They point to the power of online platforms to spread ideas and messages quickly and widely, as a reason for creating limits. Those who believe that policies like Twitter go too far in controlling speech often raise the concern around why the company owners and not the users get to decide what should or should not be allowed on the platform.

Match Question: Should private companies, like Twitter, have the right to censor speech and content on their virtual platforms?

Study Questions:

1. Are there other types of speech, beyond violent content, that companies should censor?
2. What other types of people or organizations could dictate what free speech looks like on social media?
3. Should the rules around freedom of speech in-person be applied the same way in an online environment?