

Chris Fenton

CSF - Ethics

Feb 2, 2016

Short Paper 2

On the basis that Jane wants to run an ethical company, using a virtue ethical framework, Jane should refuse to list Nazi memorabilia and neo-nazi items of her auction website. Although Jane may not be obligated by law to refuse the listings in the United States, Jane has an opportunity to establish their new company as an ethical one. Although Jane can setup their new auction company in a way that shields them from personal liability in a legal sense, and many people in business advocate for a strong separation between their personal lives and morality and their companies bottom line, if Jane wants to be a moral person, they have an obligation to run their company in a way that reflects their moral views.

The banning of hate speech and by extension the trade of Nazi and neo-nazi items raises freedom of speech concerns. Although the law in the United States favors freedom of speech, Jane is not obligated to same standard that the government is held to in this regard₁. Jane is free to set their own policies for their website concerning hate speech. If Jane personally views hate speech as unethical, they have to make the decision as to whether or not their company will make a stand on this issue. As there may be many things that are potentially listed on their auction site that Jane may not promote or agree with, the question of where to draw the line between their personal and the company's ethics becomes an important one. Jane may feel that their company cannot be as opinionated as they are, but it is important for Jane's company to have an ethical code that they can agree with. In light of virtue ethics from Aristotle's perspective₂, it is important that Jane find a middle ground between extremes. Jane, for example, may find it unethical to sell alcohol personally, but Jane might accept that not all people that sell alcohol are necessarily immoral. In the case of more extreme examples, such as torture devices or weapons of mass destruction, Jane might view that all sellers of these items are immoral. Although there are many items that Jane's site may list that they

might not support, Jane will have to find the middle ground between being totally permissive and totally restrictive. In this case, Nazi and neo-nazi items are an extreme case that Jane should ban.

Even though Nazi related items are illegal in Germany and France, it would be difficult for Jane's company to be held legally liable if the company didn't directly operate in those countries. That being said, as an Internet based company, Jane would probably be well advised to create policies that make it easier rather than harder to expand globally. But these issues would be secondary to Jane's obligation to be a moral person. Jane has the opportunity in this case to create a moral company. Although this decision may hurt the bottom line initially, it may very well be in Jane's company's long-term financial interest. There are some things that are so morally reprehensible that allowing them be listed on their website could cause customers to view the company itself as immoral. Child pornography, for example, is largely illegal internationally, but even if it wasn't, it would not only violate Jane's character based ethics to be associated with it, it would also not be in the company's best interests financially to list them. In fact, it would be an absolute public relations nightmare for Jane's company to be associated with these sorts of items. In the case of Nazi and neo-nazi related items, this could be the case as well.

In conclusion, Jane should create an ethical framework for their company that is compatible with their personal, virtue based ethics. Jane's company should ban the listing of extremely morally reprehensible items on their website. Although Jane's company may be more permissive on the types of items that they would allow than Jane would be personally, it is important that Jane finds a middle ground that they can live with. This decision is not only moral, but it may be good business. Jane's US based company may not be legally obligated to ban these items, but Jane may be morally obligated to that. Any business related benefits to this decision are a bonus.

Footnotes

1. Can Bosses Do That? As It Turns Out, Yes They Can.

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=123024596>

2. The Basics of Philosophy, Virtue Ethics.

http://www.philosophybasics.com/branch_virtue_ethics.html