

# THE PECULIAR NATURE OF THE DUTY TO HELP DURING A PANDEMIC

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A COMMENTARY IN THE **BUSINESS ETHICS IN TIMES OF PANDEMIC VIRTUAL SYMPOSIUM** ON Santiago Mejia (2020), “Which Duties of Beneficence Should Agents Discharge on Behalf of Principals? A Reflection Through Shareholder Primacy,” *Bus Ethics Q* (first online 6 October 2020): 1–29,  
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## ABSTRACT

Duties of beneficence are said to allow for leeway to discharge them. By distinguishing between two different types of leeway, Mejia (2020) identified three structurally different duties of beneficence. In this Commentary I deploy those distinctions to clarify the nature of a fourth type of duty of beneficence, one prompted by a global pandemic, a duty with a peculiar, and seldom recognized, conceptual logic. I provide some guidelines that should orient managers when they take themselves to be fulfilling such a duty on behalf of shareholders.

**THE DUTY OF** beneficence is “concerned with norms, actions, and dispositions whose ultimate aims are to promote the good of others, quite often in the form of alleviating their suffering” (Mejia 2020: 5).<sup>2</sup> Mejia (2020) offers a distinction between two types of leeway that are typically associated with it:

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<sup>2</sup> Doing good for the sake of improving one’s reputation is an instance of prudence, not beneficence. Doing good to right a wrong one has caused is an instance of the duty of justice, not of beneficence.