14. Defences II: general defences

Criminal Law Directions (5th edn)
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Without assuming prior legal knowledge, books in the Directions series introduce and guide readers through key points of law and legal debate. Questions, diagrams, and exercises help readers to engage fully with each subject and check their understanding as they progress. This chapter explores the remaining general defences: self-defence and the prevention of crime, duress, duress of circumstances, and necessity. A defendant may rely on self-defence where he honestly believes that use of force is necessary in order to protect him and the force used is reasonable. The issue of duress arises where the defendant is threatened that he must commit a criminal offence or suffer physical injury or injury to his family. Duress excuses a defendant’s behaviour as a concession to human frailty, whereas necessity justifies it. Necessity does not require a threat made by a person of death or physical injury, but merely a choice between two evils.
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