5. Murder and voluntary manslaughter

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 elements of murder and the partial defences which reduce a defendant’s liability to voluntary manslaughter. Murder is a common law offence that is committed when a defendant unlawfully causes the death of a person with an intention to kill or cause grievous bodily harm (GBH). Where a defendant has both the actus reus and mens rea for murder, but also has one of three special, partial defences available to him, his liability for murder is reduced to that of manslaughter (voluntary manslaughter). Loss of control, diminished responsibility, suicide pact, and infanticide are also discussed.

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