## The Moral Relevance of Combatants’ Consent

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In this paper, I have two aims: first, to elucidate the importance of (just) combatants’ consensual membership of the military for the burdens they can be expected to bear when participating in war, and, second, to analyse some of the ways in which combatants’ consent can be considered to be nullified by certain recruitment practices, drawing in particular on research into the recruitment of young people into the US military. I argue that combatants’ consent is important, among other reasons, because it is one way, if not the most important way, in which we can justify combatants’ duty to (when necessary) risk their own lives. This argument has important consequences for our understanding of the permissibility of conscription or the draft.

However, military recruitment campaigns often target those from poor neighbourhoods, and advertising often explicitly presents a career in the military as not just a way to earn qualifications but also as a way out of poverty. We might therefore worry whether young recruits can to some extent be considered “forced” by their circumstances. I suggest that those with a very limited, barely acceptable set of options open them may be described as more constrained in their eventual choice than those who have a rich, valuable set of options. In order to understand what counts as a valuable set of options, we may appeal to whether or not a particular option threatens a person’s *basic needs*. However, we need more than that: in order to live a valuable, autonomous life, we do not merely need our basic needs met right now, but we need to have them met with some predictable degree of security. In order to make plans and live our lives, we need to, for instance, be able to trust that we will not suddenly become homeless. So, although a life as an unskilled manual labourer in poor conditions with little job security may not be *unacceptable*, it may be the case that it does not provide enough security to count as a *valuable* option. Thus if the options open to a recruit are such a life or joining the military, and the recruit does feel like her choice is somewhat forced by these circumstances, her choice to join the military may be less than fully voluntary.

On the other hand, however, we might worry about other effects of the combination of recruiters targeting certain areas and the relative scarcity of options available to those being targeted. For instance, this situation raises the worry of adaptive preferences, and whether they may affect recruits’ ability to meaningfully consent to life in the military and all it entails.

## Author information

AUTHOR: Dr Sara Van Goozen

AFFILIATION: Politics, University of York

EMAIL: sara.vangoozen@york.ac.uk

BIOGRAPHY: I am an Associate Lecturer in Political Philosophy at the University of York. Prior to joining York, I completed my PhD in Political Theory at the University of Manchester. I’m interested in just war theory, the ethics of war, global justice, and videos of cute baby animals.