Coordinating Individualism to create Society

Historic Background: Enlightened Philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau believe that by forming society man was improving himself and the others around him. Central to Rousseau's beliefs was the idea of the **general will**. To Rousseau, the general will represented the collective values and wisdom of society. Society is coordinated and unified by the general will.

Rousseau believed that since the general will represented the values of the community it must be administered by a benevolent authority (government). Rousseau also believed that the general will demanded the unqualified obedience of every individual.

Rousseau thought private property to be the source of social ills. He considered that private ownership of property tended to corrupt men and destroy their character and regarded the man without property to be the freest. Although he did not actually support the abolition of private property, he believed that private property should be minimal and should be distributed equally among the members of the society.

Rousseau appealed to people to surrender their individual rights to a new moral and collective body with one will. Therefore the general will was formed by a social contract. What it willed was the true interest of what everyone wanted whether they realize it or not. According to Rousseau, when you are forced to obey it, you really are obeying yourself, the true and free you.

Stag hunt

To illustrate his views, Rousseau told the story of the Stag hunt.

Story: Villagers go on a hunt. If they cooperate and hunt the stag (deer) the potential reward if greater than if they hunt on their own and only capture a rabbit. They need to be patient and work together for the stag or they can go out on their own and kill the rabbit which would be easier but would also jeopardize the chances for the other hunters.

The diagram below is the matrix of the story.

1. **What does this story tell us about social cooperation?**

2. **Why might some people refer to this game as the trust game?**

3. **Although hunting the Stag may result in the greatest reward, why does it also have the highest risk?**

4. **Should a hunter be forced to share in the risks? Why or why not?**

5. **If you believed that the other hunter was going to hunt the Stag what should you do? Why?**

6. **If you believed that the other hunter was going to hunt the rabbit what should you do? Why?**

7. **If nobody in the village trusted each other what is the equilibrium point?**

8. **If there was trust in the village what is the equilibrium point?**

9. **What would be some methods to better ensure that each hunter would hunt the Stag? Consider methods using the power of the government and methods that don't use government power.**

10. **To what extent is hunter's sense of the impartial spectator motivation enough to cooperate?**

11. **Do you feel that the village has the right to tell a specific hunter that they cannot hunt for rabbit if they feel that it will prevent the village from eating a Stag? Explain your logic.**

12. **Assume the hunters individual cost is the same regardless of what he hunts. What if the hunter's shared portion of the Stag meat (shared portion of the marginal social benefit) amounts to less meat than if he had hunted a rabbit on his own (marginal private benefit). Should he be forced to hunt the stag? Explain your logic.**

Hunting the rabbit   **Marginal Cost= Marginal Benefit**

Hunting the Stag   **Marginal Private Cost > Portion of the share social Marginal Benefit**

13. **Relate this story to the individual rights, the original dilemma, reputation, law, and contracts.**

14. What do you think Rousseau would consider the "general will" of the story? How would he answer question 10? Explain your logic

15. What if any are the potential negatives of forced cooperation?

16. Using the basic model of "Stag Hunts" found below, brainstorm real situations (current and/or in history) that can relate to this story.

| | | Player 2 | |
		Defect	Cooperate
Player 1	Defect	OK, OK	OK, Bad
	Cooperate	Bad, OK	Best for all