The evening began with this rapporteur and facilitator relaying a personal experience from 1983, shortly after he graduated college. As he toured Europe, he met Hedrun Ferner, an Austrian whom had experienced the benevolence of the American servicemen at the conclusion of World War II as they occupied the sector of Salzburg where Hedrun, a child at the time, was living. Hedrun, nearly forty years after the occupation, showed great kindness to the facilitator. When Matt finally said goodbye to Hedrun some days later, she expressed her desire that he tell his “young friends in America” that “not all of Europe has forgotten” [the kindness that the Americans portrayed at the end of the Second World War].

Matt posed a rhetorical question after telling the emotional story. He asked the participants to hypothesize the values that the United States of America had exhibited through its treatment of the defeated Austrians. What American values might the Austrians have supposed underscored the way the Americans treated the vanquished?

Matt then asked another rhetorical question. Does either of the Democratic or Republican party promote values that reflect the values that post World War II America apparently embodied? He asked the participants to consider the question in light of the fact that Democrats claim to represent values of the working class and “underclass,” while Republicans equally adamantly claim to safeguard “American values.” Are the values that Democrats claim to represent and that Republicans claim to safeguard similar to the values that Hedrun Furner would interpret to be laudable, American values?

Members of the *Discourse* introduced themselves and then, upon concluding the introductions, discussed the question at hand. *What values do Democrats or Republicans believe their respective parties ought to portray as their own? What values ought to inspire the rhetoric, policy proposals and platforms of the parties?*

Phase One:

Discussions began immediately upon concluding the introductions, with the exception of the 23 March *Discourse*, which, with the fewest members, seemed reluctant initially to start the discussion in earnest. But as soon one member of the *Discourse* “broke the ice,” the discussion flowed freely.

The 23 March *Discourse* was most distinctive in that it followed the suggestion of one member, John Gundersen, who suggested that thinking of American Values as they relate to the “pursuit of life, liberty and happiness” would be helpful. Indeed, there was considerable discussion as to whether “life” or “liberty” or “happiness” were values. On balance, it appears that the 23 March *Discourse* members decided – or at least didn’t object – to the idea that not all three elements were values per se; they were “pursuits,” someone suggested. In any case, Matt took the opportunity to suggest that the three terms might not be fully transparent nor, for that matter, independent.

For example, the term “life,” that is unless we meant the existence of biological life, seemed to most *Discourse* members to be too abstract for it to be a value, or at least a value that would lend to discourse and deeper understanding of either party’s values. The term “happiness,” *Discourse* members suggested, might indeed be a value, but it might be problematic also as used in the phrase, “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” because the phrase suggests that each term holds a similar position of importance. Members recognized that the three terms are not likely to be equally important – if only because one term might be a prerequisite for another term. In other words, one term might help to “support” or define another term. For example, “happiness” might not be possible without the existence of “liberty.” “Liberty” might be a necessary ingredient to allow for happiness and thus, does not occupy the same stature as the term, “happiness.”

The notion of some values being component parts of other values allowed Matt to remind the participants about the notion of values hierarchies or values trees as explained in the introductory essay that participants had the opportunity to read prior to the *Discourse* convening. The idea of a values tree or a hierarchy allowed for a discussion of the possibility that a person or party could identify core values and additional values that supported or defined the “higher order” or “core” value.

Michelle Mock, who was a member of the 23 March session, provided an excellent explanation to help all of us understand the concept of core values (and supporting values). For example, we might think of “happiness” as a core or higher order value and “liberty” as a value that might fall below “happiness” in a values tree, in a place that would show “liberty” as a supporting value. We could further postulate that “health” and “security” and any additional number of values might help to define “happiness” would also fall under the core value of “happiness” in the values tree.

The previous paragraph’s examples can be thought to suggest that a person or party might think of “happiness” as a core value (maybe even a singularly high or supreme value) under which subordinate values, liberty, health, and security (and possibly others) might be placed, since the subordinate values might all be necessary for an entity to assume general happiness. Furthermore, one can see that each of the subordinate values might have several values that are still subordinate to them. Health, for example, might be reasonably be defined by (or have prerequisites of) several types of health – all of which could reasonably be thought of as values: physical health, mental health, financial health, etc. The same can be said for “security” and “liberty.”

After some more discussion about hierarchy, the participants got to business building an initial list of values that they think ought to represent the values of the two parties. The groups used a brainstorming approach whereby most of the discussion centered on defining or contextualizing their proposed values. There were some, but only occasional challenges to any given value that a member suggested.

The table of “American Values” below documents the values that each *Discourse* session articulated as being those that each or either of the political parties ought to adopt as its own. There was no effort to distinguish which values ought to be associated with any particular party. Time constraints precluded all but the 23 March *Discourse* session from providing anything but a fairly superficial discussion on defining and contextualizing the values. There was essentially no effort to determine which values might be core and which ones might support or define the core values during this phase 1 discussion. With the exception of the 23 March session, there would potentially be time to do just that in the next phase of the *Discourse*.

|  |
| --- |
| “American Values” |
| 23 Mar | 24 Mar | 25 Mar |
|  |  |  |
| Honesty | Pragmatism | Multiculturalism |
| Transparency | Choice | Independence |
| Mobility | Freedom | Responsibility |
| Social Mobility | Courage | Individualism |
| Investment | Transparency | Self-Reliance |
| Thrift | Altruism | Diversity |
| Fairness | Empathy | Self-Sufficiency |
| Equitability | Humanity | Opportunity |
| Solidarity | Caring | Equality |
| Access | Charity | Fairness |
| Opportunity | Awareness | Freedom (of Assembly) |
| Collectivism | Knowledge | Generosity |
| Individualism | Expertise | Helpfulness |
| Pragmatism | Truth | Freedom (of Religion) |
|  | Equality | Freedom (from Fear) |
|  | Equitability | Expertise |
|  |  | Knowledge |
|  |  | Fear |
|  |  | Patience |
|  |  | Trust |
|  |  | Due Process |
|  |  | Discourse |
|  |  | Education |
|  |  | Mutual Respect |
|  |  | Justice |

Phase Two:

The second phase of the each evening’s Discourse led with a brief discussion of the evening’s consolidated list of “American Values,” those listed above (for each of the three *Discourse* discussion sessions). Time constraints precluded members of the 23 March *Discourse* session from even attempting to begin phase two. That said, the members of the 23 March session did engage in perhaps the most in-depth discussion regarding the meaning of the list of values they suggested (above). The significant time that the 23 March members invested in defining their values suggests both (1) the difficulty of defining terms that are generally thought to be abstract, and (2) that there exists a considerable amount of disagreement as to the definitions – apparently between the *Discourse* members who self-identify as Democrats and Republicans but also among those whom self-identify as Democrats and among those whom self-identify as Republicans.

Time constraints also precluded the 24 and 25 March *Discourse* sessions from answering all of the questions that the above lists provoked. One example among many, it was unclear whether “Due Process,” a value listed as part of the values list of the 25 March *Discourse*, was a value or merely a manifestation or representation of a value that the members of that Discourse had already identified – “Fairness.” Perhaps “Due Process” is a subordinate value and perhaps even an “operationalizing action” that would reasonably fall under the value of “Fairness.” The *Discourses’* inability to be certain, given the time constraints faced, suggests that (1) values are difficult to talk about, and (2) they need to be defined very carefully.

The discussions then turned to developing a short list of values that the *Discourse* sessions of 24 and 25 March thought that either or each political party ought to adopt as its own. Members of the 24 and 25 March sessions separated into two groups.

The members who self-identified as Democrats were to identify the core or “top few,” values that they believed ought to define the Republican Party. Members who self-identified as Republicans were to identify core values that ought to represent the Democratic Party (The split was not complete on either evening, as there were many more self-identified Democrats than Republicans. The skew in the party affiliation was not ideal, but several self-identified Democrats agreed to work with self-identified Republicans to select the values that they think ought to comprise the Democratic Party values. And in any case, the deliberations were thoughtful – which was the reason for having self-identified party members represent the opposing party in the first place.).

The groups were encouraged to use the list that they, collectively with the other group that evening, had identified, but Feely also encouraged them to add values that perhaps the larger group might have missed during phase one of the *Discussion*.

**24 March**

***Self-Identified Democrats expressed the values they believe Republicans ought to express*** by adding three values to the list that the whole *Discourse* membership of the evening had produced earlier:

1. Virtue
2. Honor
3. Integrity.

Given time constraints, the “faux Republicans” were unable to articulate and define their list as satisfactorily as they would have wanted to. They did, upon “reporting out,” mention that they had a robust discussion within their group about “individualism” versus “the state.”

Rather than selecting individual values as core, the group – again because of time constraints – had to be satisfied to provide groupings of values that their discussions thus far had implied might be priorities – as tier one and tier two priorities. The values in each tier appear to reflect a belief in the primacy of personal rather than collective responsibility.

Tier One:

1. Responsibility
2. Liberty (i.e. acting in accord with one’s own prerogative)
3. Individualism (i.e. self-reliance)

Tier Two:

1. Industriousness (The group suggested that there is a link between industriousness and self-reliance.)
2. Freedom of choice.

***Self-Identified Republicans expressed the values they believe Democrats ought to express*** *in* a clear and concise and apparently certain way. They listed four in order of importance, although they suggested that the level of importance was close enough so that each of these four should be considered “core,” and that they indeed would reside on the same level of the values tree – if they were to be presented on a values tree.

1. Caring
2. Fairness
3. Honesty
4. Liberty

**25 March**

Neither the “faux Republicans” nor the “faux Democrats” had the time needed to provide in-depth explanations, but each group’s list of core values introduced interesting idea.

***Self-Identified Democrats expressed the values they believe Republicans ought to express***

1. Self-reliance
2. Capitalism
3. Tradition
4. Security
5. Individualism

In comparing these core values with the list that the members in aggregate generated during phase 1, it is apparent that “capitalism,” “tradition,” and “security” are added terms. The group attempted to explain the logic for the new terms. The facilitator wondered whether “capitalism” were truly a value, as opposed to a system that might allow for certain values to be expressed or rewarded: investment, knowledge. Perhaps “reward,” could have been included. The term tradition was left unspecified, although one could imagine that the value probably meant to suggest that there was a general regard for precedence or the ways of the past. And finally, the group did explain that the term “security” referred mostly or essentially to “physical security,” which appears to be a nod to the imperative of keeping the country safe in the face of terrorism or other existential physical threats.

***Self-Identified Republicans expressed the values they believe Democrats ought to express***

1. Human Dignity
2. Equality of Opportunity
3. Value of Assimilation
4. Team Limitations
5. Mutual Respect

This group also introduced new terms to the process, as neither “human dignity,” nor “assimilation,” nor “team limitations,” were terms that were included in the original aggregated list of values. There was very limited time to hear explanation for the new terms, but a couple of points made in a hurry toward the end of the night suggested the following (though subject to the facilitator’s/rapporteur’s error).

**Summary**

Several insights can be derived from the values discussions. Two are already mentioned in this report relate to the fact that values are abstract notions to most of us, **values are:**

1. **difficult to talk about**
2. **in need of careful definition.**

At the end of the 24 and 25 March *Discourse* sessions, at least one participant suggested new values that they believed important had been left off of the values list of phase 1 and had not been discussed as additions during phase 2. A couple of suggestions indicated that some of the values left off the list would be, in retrospect, potentially be core values. Those suggestions suggest that **values might also be:**

1. **difficult to conceptualize.**

Clearly, the Discussion **would have benefitted from** **much more time**, perhaps several hours, to reach consensus on a reasonably comprehensive list of values.

While producing a comprehensive list of values is difficult, it is also difficult to prioritize values and to determine the relationship among values. In other words, **it is difficult to:**

1. **determine which values are the most or least important**
2. **determine which values are core and which values are supporting or defining values of the core values.**

Lastly, and perhaps most encouragingly, it would appear, given the discussions during each of the three Discourse sessions on values, that Democrats and Republicans might actually share many values. And regarding the values that they do not share, it seems that there might be some degree of regard for those. For examples, self-identified Democrats did not endorse values of “individualism” or “self-reliance” as values that they would espouse. Yet, the same self-identified Democrats – as this repporteur was able to extract from conversation – seemed accepting of the values as legitimate. It would appear that those self-identified Democrats might indeed accept that there might be a situational dependent scale in which a degree of “individualism” and “self-reliance” might be important at the same time that “interdependency” or teamwork and collective effort might alternatively be important.

The implied mutual recognition of values is a perhaps a critical matter for a republican form of government to work, and so will be the next topic of discussion during the May *Discourse*.