

H-Diplo | ISSF

Roundtable, Volume X, No. 23 (2019)

issforum.org

Editors: **Thomas Maddux** and **Diane Labrosse**

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Jonathan Renshon. *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017. ISBN: 9780691174495 (hardcover, \$95.00); 9780691174501 (paperback, \$29.95).

Published on **19 March 2019**

Permalink: <http://issforum.org/roundtables/10-23-status>

PDF URL: <http://issforum.org/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-Roundtable-10-23.pdf>

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Introduction by Jack S. Levy, Rutgers University

International relations scholars and practitioners have long recognized that status is an important factor in world politics and that state motivations to enhance or maintain status are an important cause of international conflict. Until recently, however, no one had succeeded in defining the amorphous concept of status in a way that could generate a coherent set of theoretical generalizations and guide an empirical research strategy to test those generalizations. In the last decade that has begun to change, as we have seen a wave of theoretical and empirical analyses of the sources and consequences of status motivations. The study of status is now one of the liveliest research programs in the international relations field. In *Fighting for Status*, Jonathan Renshon has taken another significant step in moving the analysis of status from theoretical intuition to social scientific analysis, and in so doing has re-shaped the study of status in the international relations field.

Like some earlier students of status, Renshon builds on work in other disciplines, where status hierarchies, dominance, and deference are familiar concepts. He carefully defines status; differentiates it from the related concepts of reputation, standing, and prestige; and emphasizes the importance of defining relevant status communities or reference groups. Renshon develops a theory of status dissatisfaction based on the cognitive mechanism of belief change rather than on affective mechanisms involving anger and other emotional responses, an approach that is more common among IR status theorists. Renshon tests the theory with an innovative, multi-method research design based on mass and elite experiments, social network analysis, and historical case studies. He also devotes great care to measurement procedures. Renshon's historical case studies include German *Weltpolitik* from 1897-1911, Russia in the 1914 July Crisis, Britain in the Suez War, and Egypt in the Yemen Civil War, and are well-grounded in the relevant historiography.

Defining status concerns as the divergence between the status accorded an actor and the status an actor believes that it deserves, Renshon goes beyond the common question of whether status matters. He asks what kinds of actors with what kinds of attributes and dispositional traits are most likely to exhibit status concerns, under what conditions, through which mechanisms, with respect to which reference groups or status communities, and with what consequences. Renshon advances a number of interesting and important theoretical arguments to explain variations in status dissatisfaction and its consequences: individual-level status concerns vary with attributional and dispositional characteristics; states with status deficits are more likely than other states to initiate militarized interstate disputes and wars; larger status deficits increase the probability of conflict; the initiation of and victory in militarized disputes and wars increase a state's status; the goal of maximizing status gains by 'exceeding expectations' leads states to target less powerful states within the same status hierarchy; and states' primary status reference groups are local communities, so that states' status dissatisfaction in their local peer group is a better predictor of conflict than is status dissatisfaction in the global hierarchy. Renshon's experimental and empirical research generally validates these hypotheses.

Each of the contributors to this roundtable emphasizes that *Fighting for Status* is theoretically and methodologically innovative and that it makes significant contributions to the study of status in international politics. Joslyn Barnhart highlights Renshon's arguments that all states, not just those at the top of the international hierarchy, have status concerns; that status-motivated conflict strategies generally enhance status; and that diplomatic as well as military victories increase status. Other roundtable participants echo these themes and highlight additional contributions. Barry O'Neill praises Renshon's efforts at the conceptual clarification of some highly intractable concepts. Kathleen Powers praises Renshon's "sophisticated and

diverse methodological toolkit” and his “impeccable attention to operationalizing status.” Robert Trager emphasizes Renshon’s use of an innovative measure of network centrality to help measure status.

At the same time, each contributor that *Fighting for Status* raises important analytic questions that Renshon does not fully address. Barnhart asks exactly how – through what causal mechanisms – conflict can increase state status. She agrees with Renshon’s argument about the role of conflict in revealing information about state capabilities and enhancing one’s ability to “bargain over status.” She argues, however, that conflict can also reveal important information about other factors influencing a state’s bargaining leverage, including a state’s self-perception, its motivations to increase status, and its willingness to pay the costs of doing so.¹ Barnhart also asks exactly whom the status dissatisfied state is trying to influence – all states in the relevant status group, or some subset of that group? Examining the evidence Renshon provides in his case study of German Weltpolitik prior to the First World War, Barnhart concludes that the strategy to enhance Germany’s status was aimed almost exclusively at influencing the perceptions and behavior of Britain and France.

O’Neill focuses primarily on the distinction between status and power, which is one of the most fundamental and difficult issues involved in the analysis of status in international politics. Although O’Neill generally concludes that Renshon’s concept of status explains more than does a narrower power-based theory, he argues that further clarification of the concept of power would be helpful—for Renshon and for international relations theorists as a whole. O’Neill gives particular attention to the distinction between power over someone and power to do something, associates *Fighting for Status* with the former, and argues that the later has greater analytic utility and can more easily be differentiated from status.

Powers notes Renshon’s persuasive experimental evidence that the impact of status threats on the escalation of conflict is influenced by individual dispositional variables as well as by situational variables.² She argues that Renshon might have done more to incorporate his findings of dispositional sources status concerns into his historical case studies. She notes that many of Renshon’s descriptions of political leaders from secondary sources highlight unique aspects of leaders’ personalities, including preoccupations with status or prestige, but that Renshon treats these arguments as alternative interpretations rather than as part of his theory. This is an important point. In fact, Renshon argues early on that “Status dissatisfaction is a state-level theory,” and that

¹ This is primarily a rationalist argument about strategies to increase status. In previous work Barnhart emphasizes non-rationalist as well as rationalist sources of status dissatisfaction. She argues that states are particularly likely to engage in status competition after a publically humiliating international event or act of disrespect by other states, which generate anger and other strong emotional responses. Joslyn Barnhart, “Status Competition and Territorial Aggression: Evidence from the Scramble for Africa,” *Security Studies* 25:3 (2016): 385-419; and Barnhart, “Humiliation and Third-Party Aggression,” *World Politics* 39:3 (July 2017): 532-568. Barnhart recognizes that status challenges do not always lead to conflictual strategies. On alternative strategies for advancing status, see Deborah Welch Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, “Shortcut to Greatness: The New Thinking and the Revolution in Soviet Foreign Policy,” *International Organization* 57:1 (Winter 2003): 77-110.

² Paralleling Renshon’s findings of the dispositional sources of status concerns is recent research on dispositional sources of reputations for resolve. See Joshua D. Kertzer, *Resolve in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); and Keren Yarhi-Milo, *Who Fights for Reputation? The Psychology of Leaders in International Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

“To the extent that leaders enter into the theory their status concerns are assumed to mirror those of the state” (21; also 10). Renshon misses an opportunity, as Powers argues, to integrate individual-level dispositional factors with state-level factors into a broader theory of status dissatisfaction.³

Trager raises several questions about the relationship between status and power. Noting Renshon’s findings that dissatisfied states attack states of roughly equal status, satisfied states attack states of lower status, and dissatisfied states attack relatively weaker states than do satisfied states, Trager wonders whether these results are driven by the fact that dissatisfaction is definitionally related to greater power and lower status.⁴ Trager also raises interesting questions about Renshon’s innovative algorithm for measuring network centrality.

The critiques advanced by the contributors are well-argued and well-supported. Reading them and thinking about them has stimulated some thoughts of my own, which I want to outline briefly. First, I want to follow up Barnhart’s comments on the relationship between Renshon’s theory of status and power transition theory, which Renshon treats as an alternative interpretation. It may be true that Renshon’s particular status dissatisfaction theory differs from some versions of power transition theory, but it does not follow that power transition theory necessarily excludes status motivations. “Prestige” plays a central role in Robert Gilpin’s hegemonic transition theory, and the variable of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the status quo plays a central role in A.F.K. Organski’s power transition theory, joining power parity in approaching a necessary condition for war.⁵ The problem is that power transition theorists have had an extraordinarily difficult time operationally defining and measuring (dis)satisfaction, to the point that they have generally downplayed the importance of the (dis)satisfaction variable and given primary emphasis to the dynamics of shifting power. This narrowing of the theory led Andrew Greve and myself to modify power transition theory by incorporating status dissatisfaction as an important component of the key concept of dissatisfaction in power transition theory.⁶

Defining status dissatisfaction much like Renshon does – as the gap between the benefits a state receives from the system and the benefits it believes it deserves – Greve and I applied the theory to the power transition between China and Japan in the late nineteenth century. Our historical interpretation provides a nice fit with Renshon’s theoretical model, with a twist: for Japan, the war against China in East Asia was a strategy to advance its primary goal of becoming an internationally recognized great power in the emerging global system. That is, Japan identified two relevant status communities, the local East Asian status hierarchy and

³ Renshon notes that his merging of individual and state status concerns contrasts with the common distinction between an individual leader’s reputation and the state’s reputation (10), but he does not offer much of an argument for excluding individual-level status concerns.

⁴ Some status hierarchies have nothing to do with power. Examples include status hierarchies defined by environmental or humanitarian issues. See Benjamin de Carvalho and Iver B. Neumann, *Small State Status Seeking: Norway’s Quest for International Standing* (London: Routledge, 2014).

⁵ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) and A. F. K. Organski, *World Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), chap. 14.

⁶ Andrew Q. Greve and Jack S. Levy, “Power Transitions, Status Dissatisfaction, and War: The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895,” *Security Studies* 27:1 (2018): 148-78.

the club of globalizing European powers, and prioritized the global over the local. This corresponds with Powers's comment that "status is both local and global." Whether this is generally true, and whether Renshon is correct that most states at most times are preoccupied with local status communities, is an empirical question requiring further research.

Historical case studies of status and conflict need to engage alternative explanations based on power and security motivations, as Renshon is careful to do. This involves the question of whether states seek status because it is intrinsically valuable as an end in itself (including its psychological benefits), or because it is instrumentally useful in the pursuit of tangible material ends.⁷ Instrumental status motivations lead to the distinction between status and reputation, which Renshon defines as "judgments about an actor's past behavior that are used to predict future behavior" (38). States have reputations for many things, but IR conflict scholars have traditionally focused on reputation for power or resolve and linked reputational interests to future power and influence.⁸

The problem is that the concepts of status and reputation are often confounded. As Renshon writes, "Honor and reputation ... are often used interchangeably with status, especially in political science" (37).⁹ The same is true of political leaders, who frequently use these terms without articulating what they mean. This confounding of terms complicates our task of interpreting political leaders' statements about the importance of "defending the national honor" or "avoiding a national humiliation." To take one example, at the critical 24 July 1914 Council of Ministers meeting, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Sazonov warned that "if Russia failed to fulfill her historic mission [of protecting Serbia and the Slavonic people in the Balkans], she would be considered a decadent State and would henceforth have to take second place among the Powers.... Russian prestige in the Balkans would collapse entirely" (Renshon, 229). How do we interpret this statement? Renshon, drawing on other evidence as well, argues that "Russian leaders saw the conflict as mostly—though not totally—about status... [and that] the *material* values at stake were extremely low" (232). In a recent article my coauthor and I reach the opposite conclusion, arguing that "Russian leaders feared that concessions ... would undercut Russian reputation for resolve in great power politics, significantly reduce its influence in the Balkans, and ... lead to a significant adverse shift in the balance of power."¹⁰ There is room for further debate based on deeper historical analysis, but the point is that one has to be extremely careful in using actors' statements about status, prestige, honor, and respect as conclusive evidence in support of hypothesized

⁷ Renshon offers an excellent discussion, and emphasizes the difficulties of distinguishing these concepts analytically and empirically (47-50).

⁸ Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966).

⁹ Similarly, O'Neill writes that "'Status' lies in a constellation of social influence concepts, including 'prestige,' 'honor,' 'respect,' 'esteem,' 'admiration,' 'reputation,' 'face,' 'legitimacy,' 'authority,' and 'moral authority.'" This is the only mention of reputation in these commentaries.

¹⁰ Jack S. Levy and William Mulligan, "Shifting Power, Preventive Logic, and the Response of the Target: Germany, Russia, and the First World War," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 40:5 (2017): 731-769, at 757. We note that in his report to the tsar the next day, Sazonov said little about status or honor, and argued that Russia's "sole aim it is to prevent the establishment of Austrian hegemony in the Balkans" because "the balance of power in Europe ... is seriously threatened."

motivations. We must interpret such statements in a broader context and with sensitivity to possible alternative meanings.

I would like to end with a comment about status and German *Weltpolitik*, which is the focus of chapter six in *Fighting for Status*. This is not the first application of the status motivations to Germany's world policy,¹¹ but Renshon approaches the subject from the distinctive perspective of his status dissatisfaction theory. He is careful to delimit the study by focusing on the role of status dissatisfaction as the primary source of Germany's aggressive foreign policy during this period. Readers will, however, naturally make inferences about the role of status and *Weltpolitik* in the origins of the First World War. There is little doubt that *Weltpolitik* and the Anglo-German naval race contributed to First World War, but their relationship is a complicated one. The fact is that in 1911-1912 Germany, unable to mount a serious challenge to England on the high seas, unilaterally abandoned the costly Anglo-German naval race, shifted resources back from the navy to the army, instigated a "retreat to the continent,"¹² and succeeded in achieving a temporary *détente* with England.¹³ One might agree with Renshon that Germany's *Weltpolitik* was motivated by status and was "aggressive and irrational" (219), but still make a strong argument that the period of *Weltpolitik* illustrates the phenomenon of a great power that was unwilling to fight for status.

Participants:

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Jack S. Levy is Board of Governors' Professor of Political Science at Rutgers University and Adjunct Senior Research Scholar at the Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies at Columbia University. He is past-president of the International Studies Association and of the Peace Science Society. Levy's primary teaching and research interests are the causes of interstate war, foreign policy decision-making, political psychology, and qualitative methodology. His recent books include *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, 2nd ed.

¹¹ Michelle Murray, "Identity, Insecurity, and Great Power Politics," *Security Studies* 19:4 (2010): 656-688; Tudor A. Onea, "Between Dominance and Decline: Status Anxiety and Great Power Rivalry," *Review of International Studies* 40:1 (January 2014): 125-152; Reinhard Wolf, "Rising Powers, Status Ambitions, and the Need to Reassure: What China Could Learn from Imperial Germany's Failures," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 7:2 (2014): 185-219; and Steven Ward, *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017, chap. 3).

¹² The term is from the chapter 7 title of V.R. Berghahn, *Germany and the Approach of War in 1914* (New York: St. Martin's, 1973).

¹³ Sean M. Lynn-Jones, "Detente and Deterrence: Anglo German Relations, 1911-1914," *International Security* 11:2 (Fall 1986): 121-150.

(2013, co-edited with Leonie Huddy and David O. Sears), and *The Outbreak of the First World War: Structure, Politics, and Decision-Making* (2014, co-edited with John A. Vasquez).

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Kathleen E. Powers is an assistant professor in the Department of Government at Dartmouth College. Her research engages questions at the intersection of political psychology, foreign policy, and international conflict and cooperation. Her published work appears in the *Journal of Politics*, and current research includes a book-length project on social identities in international politics alongside a variety of pieces on foreign policy public opinion. She earned her Ph.D. in political science at the Ohio State University in 2015.

Robert F. Trager is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of California, Los Angeles. He has also taught at Yale and Oxford Universities, held an Olin Fellowship at Harvard University, and worked in investment banking in New York. His book, *Diplomacy: Communication and the Origins of International Order*, was published in 2017 by Cambridge University Press. His articles have appeared in such journals as the *American Political Science Review*, the *American Journal of Political Science*, the *Journal of Politics*, *International Organization*, *International Security*, and *Security Studies*. Current research projects include the moral and emotional bases of foreign policy preferences, the strategic implications artificial intelligence developments, the role of women in making democracies more pacific and the dynamics of affinity networks.

Review by Joslyn Barnhart, Wesleyan University

Jonathan Renshon's *Fighting for Status* constitutes a significant advance in our understanding of how status shapes state behavior. Renshon provides some of the first convincing empirical evidence that states that receive less status than they believe they deserve are more likely to engage in conflict. In a departure from theories of status inconsistency, he argues that status-dissatisfied states engage in conflict not out of frustration or anger at being denied their rightful place but because it often makes strategic sense for them to do so.

One major advance of Renshon's book is the identification of status communities. Status is social and relative and state perceptions of how much status they should be accorded are based upon comparisons with the attributed and deserved status of other states. But to which other states do they compare themselves? Many scholars have focused on the importance of status to states at or near the top of the international hierarchy. As Renshon notes, however, most states in the international system do not compare themselves with great powers. Rather, they engage in relative comparison with a subset of states that, for reasons of geography or history, exist within a status community. Renshon's theory therefore has predictive value for the behavior of all states, not just those at the top. The inclusion of lower status states into the status framework is a necessary step in the study of status in IR. We have no reason to believe, after all, that only those at the top of a hierarchy are concerned about their relative position. Rather, psychologists, sociologists, and animal behaviorists have demonstrated that status concerns affect the behavior of actors at all strata of a social hierarchy.

Another advance is the book's empirical demonstration that conflict strategies work for status-seeking states. Scholars have often asked whether the strategies status-seeking states employ actually boost the status of the state. Renshon offers the first rigorous empirical analysis of this question and shows that engaging in conflict does on average significantly increase the amount of status a state is accorded. Renshon, moreover, shows that victory is not necessary for status improvement. Rather, initiating conflict and winning offers only moderate status benefits over initiation itself (160). How does this evidence advance our understanding of status in IR? Scholars have debated whether status-seeking is costly and irrational and/or if it is instrumental and motivated by the material benefits high status and therefore high influence bring. The finding that conflict does on average increase the status of the state suggests that status-seeking acts that may be costly in the near term may indeed have long-term instrumental benefits.

The book offers several other compelling findings about conflict and status. I will focus here on my own lingering questions about *how* exactly conflict boosts the status of the state. Because status is rooted in social perception, status-enhancing events must draw the attention of other states, ideally those within one's relevant status community. Conflict fits the bill of the sort of highly public and dramatic event that promises to shift social perception. But what is it about conflict that leads other states to re-estimate one's rightful place within a status hierarchy? According to Renshon, conflict enhances status because it allows states to "reveal capabilities (military or otherwise) during conflict that provide new information" (65) about their appropriate rank within a status community. Conflict, in this conception, provides a platform on which, as Renshon says, status dissatisfied states can "exceed observers' expectations."

This framework prompts two questions which the text does not definitively answer. First, do status-seeking states care equally about all observers or do some observers matter more? Second, what types of information does conflict reveal? I will present plausible answers considering the quantitative and qualitative evidence presented in the book.

When a state uses conflict to enhance its status, which observers matter the most? The case of Germany's *Weltpolitik* foreign policy presented in the book sheds light on the question. According to the analysis, a disjuncture emerged at the end of the nineteenth century between Germany's status expectations, bolstered by its recent relative material rise, and the status the state was accorded on the world stage. A *European* power for decades, Germany now felt it had a rightful claim to join France and Britain within the club of *world* powers. In German eyes, however, Britain and France had withheld recognition of equality. France's attempt in 1905 to increase its hold over North Africa without consulting with Germany over its interests in the region had come to symbolize this status disjuncture. In response, German leaders instigated the Moroccan Crises of 1905 and 1911, threatening war and sending gunboats to the shores of a country which Germany had no interest in acquiring.

How did German leaders think assertiveness over Moroccan affairs would help their country's status? The primary mechanism suggested in the case focuses on the behavior and intentions of Germany *vis-a-vis* the two higher status states in the international system, Britain and France. Renshon states that German assertiveness was motivated by the need to "bargain over status" (198) with these higher status states. German leaders sought to "gain advantage from" (199) and to "force concessions" out of Britain and France by demonstrating Germany's heightened resolve over territory they found to be of little material or strategic interest. According to the evidence, German intransigence at the Algeiras Peace Conference of 1906 was not intended to gain immediate influence in Africa but to force those states in attendance "to take account of Germany (201)." Similarly, Germany's naval buildup in the following years was intended as "leverage in coercing Britain to cede status that it would be otherwise unwilling to give up" (213). By forcing Britain to cede its status as the preeminent naval power, Germany could "ensure that Britain and France would take its interests into account in world affairs."

The purpose of assertive bargaining in this case would seem to resemble the purpose of conflict within power transition theory, which predicts that states who are dissatisfied with the status quo will attempt to coerce the hegemon to alter the status quo in their favor or will try to uproot the hegemon through brute force. Renshon indeed notes the similar observational implications of power transition theory and his theory of status dissatisfaction. In what ways, then, does the role of conflict in the German case differ? One primary difference relates to why dissatisfied states want to uproot the status quo. Power transition theory focuses on the instrumental benefits of reshaping the world order in one's favor. In the case of turn-of-the-century Germany, however, obtaining a greater share of world influence was more symbolic. It represented the recognition of equal status that German leaders craved.

Another difference between power transition theory and Renshon's model of status dissatisfaction is the importance attributed to social perceptions. If perceptions play any significant role in power transition theory, it is the perceptions of the hegemon that matter. Renshon's description of status dissatisfaction theory in Chapter 2 suggests that broader social perceptions play a larger role. Because status resides in social perception, status enhancement should occur only when those states within a status hierarchy come to believe that a power deserves higher status. It is unclear, however, the degree to which the social perceptions of the broader status community mattered within the German case. German leaders did at some point seek to ensure that any bargaining concessions they gained from Britain and France be made public, indicating that they did place some value on the attention of lower-status states. Germany's actions suggest, however, that it was primarily through acts of recognition by higher status states that Germany's status goals could be achieved.

This brings us to the second question: What information does conflict reveal and how does it lead other states to alter their perceptions of a state's rightful position within a status hierarchy? Both the statistical evidence in the book as well as the German case point to answers. On the one hand, there is evidence that conflict provides a public platform on which status dissatisfied states can clarify ambiguities about the distribution of material capabilities. Renshon argues, and indeed finds, that not only are states with a status deficit more likely to initiate conflict than satisfied states, they are also more likely to target weaker and higher status states. This may seem contradictory. How could targeting weaker states reveal the material capabilities of a state and thereby augment its status? The answer would depend on the origin of observer expectations of how states will perform in the international system. If in fact expectations of performance stem from a state's perceived status, rather than assessments of the state's relative material capabilities which may be harder to measure objectively, then the status-seeking state will in fact reveal that information about its capabilities by defeating a higher status state which has fallen behind in its military capacity but which has nevertheless held on to its higher rank.

The evidence also suggests, however, that conflict may serve a purpose beyond the revelation of capabilities, material or otherwise. Renshon finds that conflict initiation itself, regardless of the outcome, boosts the status ranking of a state almost as much as initiating and winning. Why would this be? It may be possible that the effects of initiation are simply picking up the effects of initiating and winning, since status-dissatisfied states appear to pick fights they can easily win. It is also possible, however, that the important information revealed through conflict may not be about material capabilities at all. Rather, conflict initiation may reveal significant information about the self-perception of the state as well as the intention of the state to augment its status and its willingness to pay costs to do so.

First, a state that initiates conflict may be signaling confidence in its own abilities, which may in turn shape public perception about how the state will perform and the rightful status it should hold. Second, the state may be signaling its status expectations to higher status states by adopting the behaviors of their desired status. High status states typically play an outsized role within their status community. States that fail to behave as high status states behave, by projecting their power abroad to shape international or regional affairs for instance, are less likely to be thought of as high status states. By engaging in acts that distinguish states of their desired status, status-dissatisfied states can shape others' beliefs that they should in fact be considered and treated like a high-status state.

The German case provides compelling support for these claims. What was Germany hoping to reveal to Britain and France with its assertiveness over Morocco? Since the crises did not escalate to the use of force, but only the display of force, one cannot say that any significant information about German material or military capabilities was revealed. Rather, what seems to have been revealed was Germany's intention to be treated as a world power and its willingness to risk significant costs in order to signal that the global rights that Germany now expected to hold "could not be trampled on" (205). German leaders intended to coerce Britain and France into recognizing Germany's global ambitions largely because exercising influence over African affairs represented the highest strata of global status at the time. By demanding a say over Moroccan affairs, German leaders believed they were behaving like other world power in the hope that they would be treated as such.

A few additional pieces of empirical evidence would further define the mechanism that relates conflict and aggression. As stated, we see in the book that initiating as well as initiating and winning can augment the

status of the state. But do we see higher status returns for initiating against certain types of states? Does initiation against higher-status weaker states provide the largest status-enhancing benefits?

I am also intrigued as to how Germany's *Weltpolitik* assertiveness would be reflected within the cross-national data on status deficits and war. Germany engaged in displays of force while in a state of status deficit. Renshon argues that Germany obtained what it wanted out of the repeated Moroccan crises: a seat at the table and the opportunity to press others to treat it as a world power. Would this supposed status win be measured as such within the statistical analysis?

This book taught me a lot and pressed me to think more deeply about the relationship between status and conflict. It demonstrates that one can convincingly test mechanisms involving social perception through rigorous and multifaceted means.

Review by Barry O'Neill, University of California, Los Angeles

In his March 2018 speech to the Russian Assembly, President Vladimir Putin revealed some remarkable new weapons. One was a nuclear-powered torpedo that could make its way into a U.S. port and detonate a large thermonuclear warhead. The Burevestnik ('Petrel'), a cruise missile, also powered by a nuclear reactor, could approach the U.S. from any direction and avoid missile defenses. One feature of these weapons is that the United States has nothing like them; another is that they do not change the strategic situation at all. Neither country has any prospect of defending itself against the other's missiles, so a victim of a first strike will still be able to destroy the attacker. Their appeal for Putin is probably not their military function but Russian prestige and status.

Many IR scholars have stressed status, but they have seldom tested a theory about it systematically or even stated one in a form that would allow testing. Renshon generates hypotheses about when and how status is important and how states can gain it by engaging in war, even if they lose. He uses case studies, coded data on militarized disputes and diplomatic representation, surveys, and laboratory experiments.

To complement the other discussants I will focus on his concept of status, in particular, on his distinction between status and power. For those of us who emphasize status-like concepts, the difference is crucial. If it is just an index of resources, we are saying nothing new, so we must bring out the difference in our definitions, and our empirical sections must make the case that a status explanation not only works, but that it does better than a power-based one.

I think Renshon achieves this goal to a considerable degree, but the two concepts are more different than he suggests. Like many IR scholars, he follows a definition that involves *power over someone* rather than *power to do something*. Working with 'power-to' is preferable. It applies in more contexts. Unlike status, power-to-do does not generate a ranking of parties, and appropriately so. I will argue that status and power-to are different in that status produces its consequences in unspecified or imperceptible ways, whereas power-to works through some action of the holder, which is understood in the context. Also, status involves a norm that the group members should follow it in bestowing deference. Revised definitions of the two concepts would lead to different empirical tests.

Much of what I say is influenced by Peter Morriss¹ on power and Cecelia Ridgeway² on status.

Defining status

I will condense Renshon's definition of status (Chapter 2) but try to be faithful to his meaning. He defines it with respect to a group G that includes the status-holder X, and with respect to a set of valued attributes that G's members possess to different degrees.

¹ Peter Morriss, *Power: A Philosophical Analysis*. 2nd edition. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); "A Response to Pamela Pansardi," *Journal of Political Power* 5:1 (2012): 91-99.

² See, for example, Cecilia Ridgeway, "Why Status Matters for Inequality," *American Sociological Review* 79:1 (2013): 1-16.

X's *status* in G is G's members' beliefs, including their higher-order beliefs, about X's ordinal position in G with respect to the valued attributes, where the higher is X's ordinal position, the more the members defer to X.

First-order beliefs refer to those about objective facts, while *higher-order beliefs* involve beliefs about beliefs, typically about those held by others. Both his definition and mine, below, take beliefs as agreeing across orders, e.g., if members believe the party has high status, they also believe that they believe it.

Renshon is right to include higher-order beliefs. It makes no sense to say, "I have high status in my group, but no one realizes it," i.e., status requires first-order beliefs. The second-order version, "I have a high status; everyone believes that privately, but they do not realize that the rest believe it," seems almost as odd. According to the definition, my having a high status implies that everyone believes that I have a high status. Assuming we know what we believe, this postulate implies beliefs of every order, so-called *common belief*. (The assumption of common belief sounds extreme, but sometimes an extreme postulate works better as a simplification.)

The valued attributes of the definition might be military holdings, democratic practice or a role in international organizations.

My definition treats status as a scale of measurement, i.e., an assignment of numbers whose arithmetical relations reflect the behavioral relations among the parties.

A *status scale* for G is an assignment of numbers to G's members such that

- (1) the members generally hold beliefs, including higher-order beliefs, that those with higher numbers possess more of the valued attributes;
- (2) members generally hold more esteem for, and defer more to, a member with a higher number than one with a lower number;
- (3) members generally hold the norm that the members deserve the esteem and deference of (2).

Status and norms

As I read Renshon's definition, the valued attributes include ones that states desire for themselves but might not see as beneficial to the group. For example, possession of nuclear weapons is often desired individually but is not normatively desirable. My definition adds two normative elements. One is that G's members see the traits as worthy of esteem, and the second is that they *feel* that they *ought* to defer to each other according to the status ranking. Renshon's later discussion seems to appeal to the second idea sometimes, as when he suggests that states strive to get the status they 'expect' and 'deserve,' so it should appear in the definition.

To test each part of the definition, we can look for a phenomenon that would count as status except that it lacks that one or another requirement. Consider celebrity, which intuitively does not seem to be status in the sense considered here. It satisfies the hierarchy requirement (some stars are bigger than others), and involves higher-order beliefs (we know that Jennifer Aniston and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar are celebrities, and we generally know that we know it.) Celebrity, however, does not necessarily bring esteem. Its basis is something

else, perhaps the public's interest in their personal lives.³ The premise that celebrity is not really status supports adding the esteem condition in the definition.

The second normative assumption, the group's belief that it *should* engage in status-based deference, fits most sociological definitions. Recent work asks why many people hold higher estimates of the abilities of certain gender and racial groups, an attitude that reinforces social and economic inequality. One explanation is a self-amplifying feedback loop, where some historical circumstance chose parties with certain irrelevant traits and endowed them with resources. They performed better, thereby solidifying the perception that the traits themselves betoken quality. This brings them further status and resources. The *Matthew effect* was named by Robert Merton and Harriet Zuckerman⁴ for the gospel verse saying that to those who already have, more is given. It leads to the notion that those higher up on status deserve their esteem and deference. If the effect is widespread among individuals, we should look for it internationally.

Status as an ordinal scale

Renshon sees status as an ordinal scale, a simple ranking. In support of this, he points out that it is “positional” (p.4), meaning, for example, that everyone cannot be high status and everyone cannot be low. I would say his reason implies only that a measure of status should be normalized for each group. Ordinality implies more than that, for one thing that we cannot compare increments, cannot assert that #1's status is slightly above #2's, but #2's is far above #3's. Ordinality seems unpersuasive in this context. Whether a scale is ordinal depends on whether its empirical manifestations are ordinal. A century ago economists viewed choices as generating only ordinal scales of preference, since all they could really observe was whether the decision-maker chose one thing over another. Another ordinal example is the Mohs scale of hardness. The observable fact that a diamond scratches a piece of glass but not vice versa is represented by assigning the former a higher number than the latter. However there is nothing innately ordinal about either phenomenon. The economists' ordinal scale gave way to interval measurement of utilities, thanks to F. P. Ramsey's idea of choices among gambles.⁵ The hardness scale continues as a matter of practicality, since it is easier for the geologist on a field trip to observe a scratch, but in a laboratory one can scratch under standard conditions, and generate stronger-than-ordinal numbers that reflect the depth. Since deference is the observable basis of status, and people can defer to different degrees, we should not insist a priori that status be ordinal.

Even if deference were dichotomous, it is possible to generate a scale stronger than ordinal. In a model of social face I assumed that one party deferred to another only if the latter's value of face was higher by some minimum value. The numbers assigned to each one's social face turned out to be measurable on an interval scale – it was their discounted utility from being at that level. (Social face was defined different from the status

³ Neal Gabler, “Toward a Definition of Celebrity,” Norman Lear Center, University of Southern California (2001), <https://learcenter.org/pdf/Gabler.pdf>.

⁴ Robert K. Merton, “The Matthew Effect in Science,” *Science* 159:3810 (1968): 56-63.

⁵ F.P. Ramsey, “Truth and Probability,” (1926) in R.B. Braithwaite, ed., F. P. Ramsey, *The Foundations of Mathematics and other Logical Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co, 1931), 156-198.

in that there were no separate traits that merited the pattern of deference. Face was the group's common expectation at the equilibrium of who would defer to whom.)⁶

Renshon's definition of power

Renshon endorses K.J. Holsti's definition of power⁷ as "the general capacity of a state to control the behavior of others." He adds, ". . . anything that aids a state in influencing or affecting the behavior of other actors can be seen as increasing its power" (41-42). I will suggest some modifications to the definition, and contrast the result with status.

Power is a dispositional concept, as is status

Defining power as "capacity," as Holsti does, seems tautological. "I have power if I am capable of something" does not get us far. A better way to is to treat it as a dispositional concept, i.e., as defined by a hypothetical condition. Examples of dispositional concepts are fragility, having an angry personality, or solubility. To say that sugar is 'soluble' in water means that *if* a piece of it *were* placed in water, it *would* dissolve. My 'power' to bring about an event E means that if I *were* to take a certain action with the intention of bringing about E, I *would succeed* in bringing about E. Do we really need to add that the sugar has the 'capacity' to dissolve in the water, and that the water has the 'capacity' to dissolve the sugar? (Status is also dispositional – if certain circumstances occur parties will grant or withhold deference.)

Power is power to bring about an event; status compares its possessors

According to Holsti's definition, cited above, the state with the power is able to 'control the behavior' of the other, but this case is extreme and rare. We would probably not even count the controllee as a full member of the international system. Countries are typically in mutual power relationships. The fact that they hold mutual power over each other is manifested by their continually engaging in negotiations.

We can avoid talking about "control" by switching the target of the definition; instead of power *over someone*, it will be power *to bring about some event*. A very rough statistic indicates the latter is more commonly used. According to the internet site Corpus of Contemporary American English (<https://corpus.byu.edu/coca/>), 'power to' is more than seven times as frequent as 'power over'. 'Power to' includes 'power over' as a special case when the brought-about event is another's behavior, but even then we would say we would usually be specific, that X could has power over Y to get Y to do E.

Just as Holsti's 'control' is too narrow, Renshon's idea that power includes any 'influencing' or 'affecting' another is too broad. 'Influencing' behavior means simply changing it in some way. If the United States attacks North Korea, North Korea has influenced U.S. behavior, but that would not count as its power. Renshon's stipulation that the power resource 'aids' the influencing state might avoid this particular example, since it suggests that the influenced behavior must be in the influencer's interest. However my definition below will require more, that someone exercising power does so as part of an *intention*, i.e., that it be part of a

⁶ Barry O'Neill, *Honor Symbols and War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).

⁷ K. J. Holsti, *International Politics: A Framework for Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1967).

plan to bring about some event, either as a final goal or a step towards one. Party X influencing Y in ways that just happen to aid X is not enough. Status, in contrast, does not require an intention of the influencing state to produce a particular act of deference.

Power does not require higher-order knowledge; status does.

Social power differs from status in that it does not require higher-order beliefs. Renshon and I would agree on this. As power is defined here, one must know one has it. If it is power is to bring about another's action, it sometimes helps that the target believes one has it, since a threat might be enough. Saul Alinsky's famous rule was "Power is not only what you have but what the enemy thinks you have."⁸ It is not always necessary, however, that the target believe in one's power, much less that there be common belief among the whole group.

Power is exercised by a specific act; status involves unspecified influence.

To exercise power, the holder takes some understood action, like issuing an order or using physical force or bribery, or making a threat. Status brings about deference less tangibly and specifically, more diffusely. 'Status' is much like 'influence' in this regard. Shakespeare continues to influence us, but has no power over us since he is not in a position to take any action. One can find plenty of contemporary references to "Ernest Hemingway's status as writer" even though he died almost sixty years ago. When someone defers to a high-status party, it might be due to the expected reactions or opinions of others in the group or to the party's internalization of the norm.

A definition of power

If we combine these ideas we have this definition: party X *has the power to bring about* event E when X can take some action A such that if X adopted the intention to bring about E by taking A, then X would bring about E by taking A.

To illustrate this but avoid the complexities of international dealings, I will use a folktale. Its variants have appeared in many countries and it is related to the Passover song "Chad Gadya." In an English version a woman is leading her pig home, and they come to a stile. The pig will not jump over it. She asks a dog to bite the pig to get him to jump the stile, but the dog refuses, so she asks a stick to beat the dog, but the stick refuses. She goes through a chain of characters until the cow gives her milk, which she feeds to the cat, who begins to kill the rat, who begins to gnaw the rope, who begins to hang the butcher, who begins to kill the ox, who begins to drink the water, who begins to quench the fire, who begins to burn the stick, who begins to beat the dog, who begins to bite the pig, who jumps over the stile, and they go home.⁹

The pig and the woman are in a mutual power-to relationship. It can delay her and she can get it to jump the stile. The woman is exercising her power over the pig; the pig is not exercising its power over her since

⁸ Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals* (New York: Random House, 1971).

⁹ James Orchard Halliwell, *The Nursery Rhymes of England: Collected Principally from Oral Tradition* (London: John Russell Smith, 1846), 182-184.

delaying her is only a side consequence of the pig's intention, which is to not jump the stile. Following the definition, all the parties have specific actions available, some involving positive inducements, like feeding milk to the cat, and some through punishment like beating the dog. Sometimes the action is a threat: the butcher "begins" to slay the ox. If he followed through and actually did it, he would not achieve his intended goal (to avoid being hanged by the rope). Power-by-threatening fits Alinsky's aphorism, since it is based on the other's beliefs about what one can do.

Discussion

The purpose of a detailed definition is, of course, to guide the logic and testing of the theory. In Chapter 4 Renshon operationalizes status in a way meant to differentiate it from power, which in that analysis is certain material resources. For status he uses the diplomatic emissaries' measure devised by the Correlates of War (COW) project, but adds a technique that, for one thing, raises the status of a state that receives ambassadors from high status states. I would question whether the recursive element follows from his (or my) definition. He argues that it makes status an aggregation of a whole community's view, but the original COW definition is already that, since the emissaries received from the whole group are just weighted and summed. It would be good to devise power and status measures that reflect the differences in their definitional elements, such as the issue of specific actions for status or the need for esteem and common beliefs for power. I realize that this is asking a lot.

'Status' lies in a constellation of social influence concepts, including 'prestige,' 'honor,' 'respect,' 'esteem,' 'admiration,' 'reputation,' 'face,' 'legitimacy,' 'authority,' and 'moral authority.' Renshon very sensibly takes on the meaning of most of these. They generally involve higher-order beliefs, which are confusing to talk about in regular English. I believe their definitions could be clarified using formal models. These function like the physical working models that a patent office insists on, to verify that there is actually something new and different whose parts fit together. Renshon avoids formal theory in the book. One remedy would be to publish the formal analyses separately in some appropriate journal.

My critique here could be as specific as it is only because of Renshon's efforts to clarify his terms. He is to be congratulated for this, and congratulated more for how far he has taken the empirical study of status.

Review by Kathleen E. Powers, Dartmouth College

Jonathan Renshon's new book, *Fighting for Status*, tackles a long-standing conceptual and empirical problem in international politics: While political scientists and policymakers agree that status 'matters,' they are less certain about when or how. Moreover, because status is a "positional, perceptual, and social" phenomenon, past work has had to wrestle with problems of both operationalization and causal inference (4). Through his theory of status dissatisfaction, Renshon offers an elegant, systematic explanation that connects variation in status concerns to interstate war.

Dissatisfied with existing arguments that limit their scope to great power and material status markers like nuclear weapons, Renshon sets out to create a theory that applies across time, and to large and small powers alike. At the broadest level, Renshon contends that status deficits, and not status rankings per se, cause conflict initiation and escalation (32). States whose material capabilities outrank their current position in the hierarchy—who do not get the international recognition they feel they deserve—initiate conflicts to reveal information to their peer competitors (57). With victory, the status-deprived state communicates that others should update their beliefs about the international hierarchy (65).

Like social identity theory's claim that members of one ingroup do not compare themselves to all other groups but only to relevant outgroups, Renshon asserts that status deficits are most important within sub-system communities. He provides empirical support for this claim in a large-n quantitative network analysis, first theorizing that states will focus their limited resources—in the form of diplomatic representation—on those who comprise their peer group. This makes it possible to derive status communities inductively, from the network itself (126-129). He then presents evidence that status deficits within local communities are better predictors of conflict than a state's position or deficit in the global hierarchy (171-172).

This theory of local status deficits is a major contribution on its own, but the more intricate details of the argument demonstrate the theory's considerable explanatory power and are among the highlights of this volume. He not only argues that dissatisfied states will start wars, but identifies the opponents who are most likely to end up in their crosshairs (166). Because dissatisfied states need to 'exceed expectations' to communicate that they occupy a higher rung of the ladder, they initiate conflicts against less powerful but comparably ranked opponents. Moreover, this works: states that win wars receive a subsequent status boost (158-162). He also looks beyond conflict initiation for other observable implications of status deficits. When status concerns are salient, states and leaders double down and escalate existing crises rather than search for a swift exit (95).

To test his arguments, Renshon employs a sophisticated and diverse methodological toolkit that combines mass and elite experiments with cutting-edge network analysis and in-depth case studies. This approach has at least three advantages. First, the experimental studies provide evidence for his key causal claim. Participants who were prompted to think about status threats escalated their financial commitment in an innovative game designed so that escalation never paid (89). Even elites doubled down when they played the game with status threats on their minds (108). Second, his impeccable attention to operationalizing status, using data on diplomatic exchanges weighted by actors' relative ranking (124-129), meets his goal of introducing a measure that is both theoretically consistent and valid across space and time. Third, both the quantitative and qualitative analyses offer direct and convergent evidence for his argument that status deficits play a role in the outcomes that we care about most in international politics, from militarized interstate dispute (MID)

initiation (164) to Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser's crippling choice to escalate Egypt's presence in Yemen (245).

Renshon's book is an important volume that advances research on status in world politics and contributes to a growing IR tradition that borrows insights from psychology and behavioral economics.¹ His herculean efforts to pre-empt alternative explanations and potential omissions make criticism a challenge. Nevertheless, key questions remain regarding the claims that status threats are moderated by dispositional traits and that status is local. Further, this ambitious book does not go far enough in addressing how and when states move *between* status communities. I address each critique below.

First, the experimental results presented in chapter 3 provide persuasive individual-level evidence that the causal effect of status threats on conflict escalation is moderated by both dispositional and situational factors. This is consistent with research on international politics in general: average treatment effects are rarely the key quantity of interest in a field that often singles out extraordinary leaders and major powers.

Yet these findings are perhaps too persuasive, given that I was left wondering throughout the rest of the book's 200 pages when they would make their way into the large-n analysis or case studies. If high-powered individuals are inoculated against the effects of status threats while status threats are magnified for low-powered individuals, does this logic translate to the state-level analysis? If so, we would expect that some measure of capabilities would moderate the effect of status dissatisfaction on conflict. States at the bottom of the hierarchy should be especially aggressive, but the effect should be smaller for those at the top. The analysis comes close to assessing this factor, as Renshon tests the hypothesis that status deficits will promote conflict across various subsets of the data. For small states, local status deficits increase the probability of both MID initiation and war. Figure 5.2 shows that among major powers, local status deficits seem to have no effect on the initiation of militarized interstate disputes (164). The chapter later refers to an additional set of analyses that deals only with major powers and treats other members of that 'club' as the reference group (in contrast to the inductive community-detection approach employed earlier in the chapter). This analysis shows that major powers are more likely to initiate MIDs than wars with this reference group. Renshon concludes that major powers are like other states—status concerns are critical—and thus misses an opportunity to situate these unstable results within the theory's situational scope conditions.

Perhaps these moderators apply only at the individual level of analysis, despite the fact that "Status dissatisfaction is a state-level theory" and the experiment is meant to test microfoundations (21). In that case, the book may have benefited from more consideration of how both the state and individual levels might work in tandem. The case studies focus on the words of individual leaders to elucidate causal mechanisms and thus offered a potential opportunity to highlight the dispositional factors that may have enhanced status concerns. The experiments show that participants high in social dominance orientation (SDO) were more likely to escalate a crisis in response to status threats, for example. While at-a-distance measurement of dispositions poses a challenge, Renshon's intricate case study of German *Weltpolitik* refers to Kaiser Wilhelm II's "almost pathological fixation on his personal prestige" (208). Later, British Prime Minister Anthony Eden is described as being "fixated on the damage to his own prestige" following Egypt's nationalization of the Suez Canal (240), and Nasser cared about his own hierarchical position along with that of Egypt (243-244). This is

¹ Joshua D. Kertzer and Dustin Tingley, "Political Psychology in International Relations: Beyond the Paradigms," *Annual Review of Political Science* 21 (2018): 319-339.

hardly dispositive evidence that these leaders would have scored at the top of a modern SDO scale, but they provide a hint for how Renshon might have more fully integrated his own theoretical claims. Rather than treat arguments that speak to Wilhelm II's desire for "personal glory" as an alternative explanation (206), the book misses a chance to articulate the degree to which Renshon's account might complement a leader-based analysis: Status matters, but especially when hierarchy-focused leaders are in charge.

My second critique concerns one of Renshon's key contributions, which is that states are primarily concerned with their status within a relevant group of peer competitors. The phrase 'status is local' is a refrain that echoes throughout the book, and the use of a community detection algorithm to identify status groups stands as one of the central methodological innovations. At the same time, the book slips between global and local positionality throughout—the conclusion asserts that "there is an international status hierarchy" while it also stresses the importance of local reference groups (260). If status is truly local, then this implies a different approach to testing a) the factors that contribute to status and b) the effect of war on decreasing the gap between a state's status and capabilities.

First, Renshon notes that states have many prospective paths to status. Victory in war offers one route, but he also tests the degree to which attributes like land area, regime type, and population contribute to a state's status. The dependent variable in this case is a state's "rank in the international system" (137). He tests the possibility that status inputs vary temporally, but not across local status communities. This is a critical oversight: if status concerns are local, sources of status should be local, too. Consider the finding that both democratic and autocratic regimes have a status advantage relative to their mixed counterparts. This implies that a consolidated regime at either extreme on the polity scale will confer global status—but it would be interesting to know whether status gains are conferred to democracies or autocracies in some communities but not others. Testing local status predictors would also bring the book closer to clarifying what it means for states to "belong to"—or identify with—a status community (261).

In addition, one of Renshon's conclusions is that "war pays" (158). States' esteem in the eyes of their international audience rises after they exceed expectations in conflict. This bolsters his conclusions about the persistent effects of status deficits—if war does not pay status dividends, why would states continue to act as if it does? Unfortunately, data limitations prevent him from testing the local success of winning at war (159). If initiating and winning wars increases status ranking among great powers but has no effect in a community of non-interventionist states, this would provide an important scope condition to the theory.

Finally, Renshon finds no evidence that states sort themselves into an intercommunity hierarchy (147), but this conclusion fits uncomfortably both with the quantitative tests involving global status and with the *Weltpolitik* case study. This case suggests that German *Weltpolitik* was predicated on local status dissatisfaction, but the evidence implies that Germany was looking beyond its status community. Lagging behind their high-status peers, German leaders wanted to signal to their neighbors that they were a force to be reckoned with. Renshon stresses that Germany exemplifies a "dissatisfied state" regardless of the reference group—its quantitative status deficit score is positive whether it is measured relative to the global, regional, or inductive hierarchy—and that Germany saw England and France as its peer competitors. Yet, the evidence explicitly points to German leaders' concerns about moving into a distinct tier of the global hierarchy. Their goals were to "improve Germany's position in the world" (191) and to gain "improved standing in the international system" (193). Kaiser Wilhelm II painted Germany as having "outgrown" its position as a relatively high-status European state: "...beyond the European Great Powers there seemed to stand the

‘World Powers.’ It was at once clear that Germany must become a ‘World Power.’” (196) In short, it seems that status is both local and global.

If states are concerned not only about their local audience, but about their aspirational community, future research should do more to theorize about when locally satisfied states might seek an exit. What prompts states to move *between* communities? A more explicit integration of social identity theory with status dissatisfaction could be fruitful: Renshon acknowledges that status is related to both positionality and identity, but the argument focuses on the former at the expense of the latter. Understanding when and how high-status states move from one group to join a new identity-based community—the conditions under which they switch their reference group—would make a substantial contribution to IR and political psychology.

Of course, neither my questions nor critiques undermine the fact that this is a rich, sweeping, sophisticated look at the role of status in world politics. *Fighting for Status* is among the best in a recent proliferation of theoretical and empirical advances.² Even scholars who are not status-obsessed would benefit from modeling future work after Renshon’s approach to evaluating a nebulous yet integral concept in international relations.

² Thazha V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth, eds., *Status in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Marina G. Duque, “Recognizing International Status: A Relational Approach,” *International Studies Quarterly*, forthcoming.

Review by Robert Trager, University of California, Los Angeles

This book argues that states fight not for material power directly, but for rank. It contends that states engage in violence when they are not accorded their due within their peer group. In advancing these claims, the book makes several important contributions to the literature on how concerns for status influence international affairs.

One of the central innovations Jonathan Renshon brings to this area of scholarship is to use more information about the structure of diplomatic networks in inferring states' status. Rather than counting the number of diplomatic representatives as a proxy for status, as other studies have, he employs Google's PageRank algorithm to account for the centrality in the network of the state sending the representative. Representatives from centrally located states are accorded more weight in estimating a state's status, and the resulting rankings are not merely a proxy for state power (136). Future researchers will follow this work's lead in employing techniques to extract information from the structure of network ties.

Renshon combines this important insight with another: social actors evaluate their status in the context of particular reference groups. Thus, the book employs another algorithm to detect the primary communities that states participate in, once again from the structure of the network of diplomatic representation. It argues that the small German states, like others, evaluated their status relative to each other rather than relative to far-away countries or even proximate great powers.

Following other work in the area, the book hews closely to "Status Inconsistency Theory," which implies that states will take status enhancing actions when they feel a status deficit.¹ Renshon argues that both initiating and winning conflicts enhance status and this is indeed born out in most of the models presented (160). The next step in the analysis is to examine how the measure of status influences decisions to engage in conflict. Material capabilities are used to proxy for the status rank that states expect to have, and the book tests whether the difference in capability-rank and status-rank within communities predicts the initiation of interstate conflicts. It finds that there is a strong association in many of the models presented. The argument acknowledges that states have a menu of options for increasing their status and future scholars will continue to debate the conditions under which states will initiate conflicts, build aircraft carriers and nuclear weapons, or seek leadership positions in international fora. A great strength of the book is its investigation of each step in long chains of causal reasoning.

Renshon then investigates the states that are targeted by status-satisfied and dissatisfied states. He argues that states should focus on targets "that give them the best chance of prevailing and/or exceeding the expectations of observers—namely, against less powerful states." Does this follow? Less powerful states give attackers the best chance of prevailing, but not the best chance of exceeding observer expectations. He also argues that dissatisfied states will target states of higher status but here too, this would only seem to facilitate exceeding expectations if status rank is a better predictor of the likelihood of victory than capabilities themselves. So, there are aspects of this area of the theory that merit further clarification and exposition, and it is important to do so because the theoretical expectations are largely born out in the empirical analyses. Dissatisfied states

¹ Renshon calls his approach "status dissatisfaction theory" because he allows for the possibility that the driver of behavior may be a rational awareness of the benefits of status rather than a purely emotional response to not being given one's due.

attack states of roughly equal status (170) while satisfied states attack states of lower status. Dissatisfied states also attack relatively weaker states than satisfied states do (169). This is fascinating. One can wonder, however, whether the fact that state satisfaction is defined in terms of power and status drives these results. That is, by definition, dissatisfaction is associated with greater power and lower status and thus dissatisfied states may have higher relative power and lower relative status vis-à-vis satisfied states even if targets were chosen at random.

The study is extraordinarily well-constructed overall, and thus the questions it leaves unanswered are interesting ones that future researchers will continue to consider. The PageRank algorithm infers the importance of particular nodes from the network structure, but can the importance of nodes in the international system be inferred from the *structure* of the diplomatic network in the way that Google infers the prestige of websites? There is a density of ties between the German states and ties between those states and great powers – can the algorithm detect which is which?

The example of status rankings from 1817 – the only example from the data presented – suggests that the answer may be a partial no. The leading state in the period, according to the data, was Bavaria, a state that could barely maintain its independence with the rise of Prussia, and which had recently been stripped of territories by the ultimate status confirming moment of the day, the 1814-15 Congress of Vienna, in which Bavaria barely participated. Listed as the fifth most prestigious state is England, which played rather a larger role in international affairs. According to the Austrian Secretary General of the Congress, “England appeared at Vienna with all the glamour which she owed to her immense successes, to the eminent part which she had played in the Coalition [against revolutionary France], to her limitless influence, to a solid basis of prosperity and power such as no other country has acquired in our days - in fact to the respect and fear which she inspired and which affected her relations with all the other Governments. Profiting by this, England could have imposed her will upon Europe.”² Although network structure is one important source of information about the prestige of states and their representatives, it would be useful to consider power and other variables in formulating the algorithm for weighting the importance of network ties.

Another interesting set of questions concerns how the appropriate reference group should be identified. Austria is placed outside of the community of German states, where it competed with Prussia for influence, and outside the community of European great powers although it was considered by all to be one. Prussia is placed in the community of German states and somehow ranked fifth there although it was certainly one of the rising powers of the day. Placement in this status community makes sense but it does not capture how Prussia saw itself in the broader community of European nations. Unlike Bavaria, Prussia did compete for influence with the great powers at the Congress of Vienna and Frederick the Great, the Prussian ruler of the previous century was known to say that his family crest should feature a monkey because Prussia could only “ape the great powers without being one ourselves.”³ Prussian ambitions may have placed it squarely in the realm of status deficit vis-à-vis great powers and thus its aggressive behavior may be readily explained by Renshon’s theory. But the data seem not to capture its status correctly. On the one hand, it is ranked below

² Harold Nicolson, *The Congress of Vienna: A Study of Allied Unity, 1812-1822* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 2000), 128.

³ Theodor Schieder, edited and translated by Sabina Berkeley and H. M. Scott, *Frederick the Great* (London: Routledge, 2016), 167.

other small German states, which is not only out of equilibrium in terms of its power but unrepresentative of the evidence from the historical record of the role it played in international affairs. On the other hand, the community detection algorithm implies that it is concerned *only* with its status among German states. This, too, does not square with the historical record. Thus, a productive direction for future work may be to develop an algorithm that allows states to be members of overlapping status communities – to care what other German states think, and to want to participate in great power politics too. It may well be that changes to these algorithms will reduce noise in the data and in fact strengthen the statistical results.

The book goes an extra mile in considering alternative explanations for the association between status deficit (Power Rank – Community Status Rank) and conflict initiation. Nevertheless, important questions remain. Renshon writes that “the most obvious competing theory for status dissatisfaction... is power transition theory.” This seems likely since, as the book points out, a rising power is also likely to be a state with greater power than status as measured by diplomatic representation. This point is made in the theoretical discussion, but the empirical results do not address whether changing power rather than status deficit in fact drives the results. The difficulty is that increases in the power rank increase the measure of status deficit if diplomatic ties remain unchanged.

A second area for future researchers to investigate involves the periods in which status concerns are more and less active. The theory suggests universality, but the table on page 164 shows that there is no effect of status deficit on conflict before the First World War. Each of the post-war periods, by contrast, shows a robust relationship. This is a puzzle because, as the book points out, conventional wisdom has it that states were most concerned with status in the earlier period.

Jonathan Renshon has produced a significant book on an important topic. Its empirical innovations represent a major advance, as do its careful considerations of each step in the chain of causal reasoning linking social group dynamics to international conflict. The book goes a long way in convincing its readers that status hierarchies, which are pervasive across the animal world, are still an underappreciated topic in international affairs in spite of the burgeoning literature on the topic. This book will be one that shapes these debates.

Author's Response by Jonathan Renshon, University of Wisconsin-Madison

I want to begin by thanking Thomas Maddux and H-Diplo for organizing this roundtable discussion on my book and the participants—Kathleen Powers, Robert Trager, Joslyn Barnhart, and Barry O'Neill—for submitting such thoughtful contributions. The reviewers did an absolutely amazing job of engaging with the book, which is really all that any author could hope for. Truly, my main regret is to have gotten such useful and thoughtful comments post-publication rather than earlier on in the process. Rather than responding to the reviews the way that one would to a journal or book editor, I want to use my allotted space to point out where I agree with the roundtable participants and to highlight questions they raise that should be part of any future research agenda on the topic of status and world politics.

Powers focuses on two issues, the first of which is how the experimental results presented in chapter 3 accord with the theory and empirics in the rest of the book. She writes that they “are perhaps too persuasive, given that I was left wondering throughout the rest of the book’s 200 pages when they would make their way into the large-*n* analysis or case studies.” The finding in the experimental chapter is that status threats exacerbate decision biases in a lab experiment of political and military leaders, but that those subjects who were “high power” were inoculated from the worst effects of the status threat. Powers points out a potential implication of this result at the international level: status deficits should have differential effects for more and less powerful states. In fact, my results—that the link between dissatisfaction and war is stronger for small states than major powers—bear this out, though she is certainly right that I missed the opportunity to make this point in the book or tie those results back to the broader theory (and in so doing to link the different empirical components of the book more tightly).

A second issue Powers points to is the constant refrain in the book that “status is local.” She is right to point out that this aspect of the theory is unevenly applied. For example, while the notion that status is local forms a central tent pole for the network analysis—and in particular the use of ‘community detection’ algorithms—there are other places where it is less prominent than it ought to be. For example, if status is indeed local (and I think it is) then it is possible that what I called the ‘inputs to status’ (what states can do to gain status) might vary across groups. I find, for example, that Intergovernmental Organizations (IGO) memberships (particularly over the period 1961-2001) were associated with a gain in status for states. Powers’s suggestion is that the prestige associated with these attributes might vary by community. My recollection is that the community detection algorithms I used made it difficult to ‘follow’ a particular community over time; doing so would require stipulating *ex ante* who was in what community, which would have defeated much of the purpose of the inductive method of community detection that I chose in the first place. That said, a more clever person than me could surely figure out a way around this, and should, since I see the ‘sources of status’ question as one of the more pressing and critical issues in the book and one that is raised but not quite definitively answered by it.

Barnhart—no stranger to the study of status herself—focuses much of her analysis on the question of *how* exactly conflict boosts the status of states in the international system. She asks two provocative questions: do actors care equally about all observers, and what type of information exactly does conflict reveal? On the first question, Barnhart notes the importance that dissatisfied states often attach to revising the beliefs of particular states about the status hierarchy. However, because status rests on higher order beliefs (actors’ beliefs about other actors’ beliefs) in some senses, any state does need to change the beliefs of the majority of other states in the community: **A** can’t have higher status than **B** if only a few other states believe that to be true. How can we square these two ideas? In fact, Barnhart’s question suggests the notion of ‘belief entrepreneurs’: if China,

the U.S., Russia, India, and Brazil all come to believe that France has more status than the United Kingdom, and act as if it were so, it is entirely possible that other members of the community would update their beliefs eventually in response to the behavior of the major powers.

Barnhart's second question touches on the critical issue of how exactly the mechanism that links status to conflict works. I argue in the book that the initiation of conflict works to alter a state's status because conflict has several important qualities (it is public, highly salient, and conveys unambiguous information). However, in some cases, the way in which that mechanism works is less obvious. Germany, as Barnhart points out, probably was not able to reveal much information about its capabilities in the Morocco crisis since it did not escalate to the use of force. While some information about Germany's capabilities might have been revealed—and certainly some information as well about other attributes, such as resolve and risk-propensity—this type of crisis steers us to other potential mechanisms that states might use to gain status. In this case, Barnhart points out that “German leaders believed they were behaving like other world powers in the hope that they would be treated as such.” I think this interpretation is compelling, and wonder if the literature on status in IR (focused as it is already on social identity theory) might benefit from engagement with Constructivist work on socialization and emulation to understand alternative mechanisms that looks a lot like the proposition ‘act like a great power until others recognize that you are one.’

Trager focuses much of his attention on the notion of ‘local’ status communities, and in particular whether my way of measuring them lines up with both the concept of status and our intuitions regarding particular historical cases. As for his questions regarding the particular historical cases in 1817, I am happy to agree with him that there is a promising research agenda for future work in figuring out how to improve the community detection algorithm. In terms of face validity, it does well enough on the years 1817 and during the Cold War—by recovering U.S.-Soviet allies and spheres of influence—but there are clearly cases where states appear to be placed in the ‘wrong’ communities. One problem, which is pointed out in the book and also by Trager, is that the community detection algorithm does not allow states to be members of multiple (sometimes overlapping) status communities: it fits them into one and only one community in a given year. This is a significant issue since, as I point out in the book, one way in which status concerns come into play is precisely in the cases of states that desire to be part of a community even though there is not common agreement that they belong there. The algorithm would certainly miss this, and other, interesting and important cases, and there is much work yet to be done here.

O'Neill focuses much of his discussion (as formal theorists are wont to do) on the concepts and definitions of power and status. My own thinking on status and how it fits with other cognate concepts was heavily influenced by O'Neill's work, so it is no surprise that I largely agree with most of what he has to say in his review. One point of minor disagreement concerns whether status ratings are (as I argue) ordinal. O'Neill points out that since people can defer to different degrees, ordinality might not be the best way of describing status hierarchies. One way to square this is to note that the measure of status I use (ranks) is ordinal, and that (in practice) we mostly observe which state defers to which other state, which generates an ordinal ranking. However, it also seems clear that O'Neill is right in a broader sense: in the Cold War, for example, we intuitively know that the difference between ranks **1** and **2** (the U.S. and U.S.S.R.) was much smaller than the difference between ranks **2** and **3**. Future work might benefit from attempting to sort through some of the empirical implications of thinking of status as an interval, rather than ordinal scale. One obvious real-world analogue of this is the disproportionate gains that come from attaining primacy in a hierarchy.

Another minor point of disagreement regards the measure of status I constructed from the Correlates of War diplomatic data. O'Neill writes that "the original COW definition" already measures states as an "aggregation of the whole community's view" since "the emissaries received from the whole group are just weighted and summed." That is certainly true, but the more traditional method (summing the number of diplomats received for each state) implicitly assumed that all states' diplomats should 'count' equally, whether they were sent from the United States or Togo. I do not think earlier scholars necessarily believed this, but they encountered technical issues in trying to weight the representation by the status of the sending state: where does that initial value come from? If the data begins in 1817, how do we assigned status values in that year to each country in order to weight higher-status diplomats more strongly? The PageRank algorithm I use solves at least some of these issues, and brings the measure into closer alignment with our (well, at least my) conceptual understanding of status, in which high status actors have a differential ability to confer status through recognition.

Time and space preclude me from responding to the numerous issues also raised by the discussants. I urge my colleagues and any future scholars interested in international status, prestige, power and conflict to read the reviews closely. They are full of useful correctives, alternative interpretations and thoughtful questions that I hope will stimulate research in the coming years. I look forward to continuing my work on this topic (aided by the ideas proposed in this roundtable) and more importantly, to reading the work of others, including the discussants, in the coming years on this subject.