

NEW EMPIRICAL STUDIES ON THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM: A BOOK TALK

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On 2 June 2020, the Centre for Comparative and Public Law (CCPL) at the University of Hong Kong hosted a ‘webinar’ discussion with the authors of two recently published and path-breaking empirical studies on the UK Supreme Court: Rachel Cahill-O’Callaghan, author of *Values in the Supreme Court: Decisions, Division and Diversity* (Hart 2020); and Chris Hanretty, author of *A Court of Specialists: Judicial Behaviour on the UK Supreme Court* (Oxford University Press 2020).

Cahill-O’Callaghan explained how her book, *Values in the Supreme Court*, draws on theory and methods from psychology to show that varying value-orientations underpin decisions in the Supreme Court. In particular, she finds that split decisions often reflect a division between judges with opposing value priorities: those judges that are inclined to favour the values of traditionalism and conformity and those judges that are inclined to favour the value of universalism.

Hanretty explained how his book, *A Court of Specialists*, illuminates the powerful influence that legal specialisation has on all stages of the Supreme Court’s decision-making process. As Hanretty explained, however, his book’s empirical findings suggest that political ideology also has an important influence on the court’s decisions—although most decisions are unanimous, patterns of agreement and disagreement in split decisions can be explained in terms of an underlying left–right ideological dimension of disagreement.

The ensuing discussion was chaired by Alex Schwartz, Deputy Director of CCPL, and it touched on methodology, future directions for empirical research on judicial behaviour in the UK, and the political implications of the books’ important findings.