

Being Fair To New Religious Movements: Virtue Ethics and Social Research

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Abstract. New religious movements, sometimes referred to pejoratively as cults, have become a subject of academic interest and a focus of societal and government concern. Accounts of some new religious movements have appeared in the media and in academic books and journals that are distinctly at odds with the self-portrayals of new religious movements and may also be deemed unfair by them and by scholars. A case study of Susila Budhi Dharma (Subud), a new religious movement originating in Indonesia is presented to show how the unfair treatment of an NRM can be carried out in the context of an apparently scholarly study. It is suggested that there is a need for researchers on new religious movements to adopt virtue ethics rather than simply comply with an institutional code of research ethics.