

**Plasticity and perfection:
emotions and the moral domain**

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Abstract According to de Sousa's famous 'new biological hypothesis 2,' '[e]motions are species of determinate patterns of salience among objects of attention, lines of inquiry, and inferential strategies.' Among other things, this turns out to mean that a particular emotion functions both to recognize and to focus the agent's attention on instances of its characteristic object, as well as to motivate a characteristic suite of responses to that object (in and) by the agent. Quoting de Sousa further, we can say that emotions thereby effect a double 'control of salience,' once on their input side and again on their output side. In this paper, I explore the question of how much developmental plasticity emotions exhibit in their performance of this double control. To this end, I describe two different models that can be used to demonstrate the plasticity of an emotion, which I call the 'fixed culture' model and the 'variable culture' model, respectively. My discussion is limited to the examples of fear and sympathy (one a 'basic' emotion, the other not). The relevance of my conclusions about emotional plasticity is mediated by the conjecture -- stated here, but not defended -- that an emotion's double control of salience is epistemically useful, both in general and in the moral domain specifically. Most importantly, the plasticity of emotion allows for its epistemic contributions to be improved, and to that extent, perfected.