Can we learn from our mistakes? Does the large body of research demonstrating hindsight bias indicate that people are not likely to take responsibility for their errors and thus deprive themselves of the opportunity to learn to avoid such errors in the future? This examines two somewhat contradictory theories of hindsight bias, defensive processing and retroactive pessimism, and proposes a “motivated sense-making” model as a possible similar common pathway for the two processes. Specific attention is given to the implications of each process with regard to learning from one's mistakes.

*The most fruitful lesson is the conquest of one's own error. Whoever refuses to admit error may be a great scholar but he is not a great learner. Whoever is ashamed of error will struggle against recognizing and admitting it, which means that he struggles against his greatest inward gain.*

—Goethe, *Maxims and Reflections*