

# EPILOGUE

Underestimating the evolutionary potential of living organisms is the single most important mistake made by those who use chemical means to subdue nature.

MARC LAPPE, Ph.D.

One of the most important lessons from our ancient legends and myths is that the gods take a dim view of human arrogance. Ancient versions of this message are to be found in the story of the woman who thought she could weave better than the gods and, after losing a weaving contest, was turned into a spider for her presumption. Another is the legend of Achilles, whose mother dipped him into water that made him invulnerable — except, of course, for the heel by which she held him. To this day, an “Achilles’ heel” serves to remind us of the foolishness of thinking ourselves invulnerable. An even more recent warning to us is Mary Shelley’s book *Frankenstein*. The message in her book was the same as that of the ancient legends and myths; in this instance, the warning was specifically about the arrogance of medical science in thinking it could take upon itself the capacities of the gods. In spite of our learning and great technology, these older warnings are still relevant to our species. As Vaclav Havel so eloquently put it, there are powers in the Universe against which it is advisable not to blaspheme. Perhaps it is fitting that the lowly bacteria will be the one to teach us humility.

*Chymia egregia ancilla medicinae; non alia peior domina.*  
(Chemistry makes an excellent handmaid but the worst possible mistress.)