

# Phytochrome B Affects Responsiveness to Gibberellins in Arabidopsis<sup>1</sup>

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Plant responses to red and far-red light are mediated by a family of photoreceptors called phytochromes. *Arabidopsis thaliana* seedlings lacking one of the phytochromes, *phyB*, have elongated hypocotyls and other tissues, suggesting that they may have an alteration in hormone physiology. We have studied the possibility that *phyB* mutations affect seedling gibberellin (GA) perception and metabolism by testing the responsiveness of wild-type and *phyB* seedlings to exogenous GAs. The *phyB* mutant elongates more than the wild type in response to the same exogenous concentrations of GA<sub>3</sub> or GA<sub>4</sub>, showing that the mutation causes an increase in responsiveness to GAs. Among GAs that we were able to detect, we found no significant difference in endogenous levels between wild-type and *phyB* mutant seedlings. However, GA<sub>4</sub> levels were below our limit of detectability, and the concentration of that active GA could have varied between wild-type and *phyB* mutant seedlings. These results suggest that, although GAs are required for hypocotyl cell elongation, *phyB* does not act primarily by changing total seedling GA levels but rather by decreasing seedling responsiveness to GAs.

Phytochromes are a family of light-sensing proteins that mediate plant developmental responses to red and far-red light (for review, see Furuya, 1993). They consist of an apoprotein with a covalently attached linear tetrapyrrole chromophore and are interconverted by light between red- and far-red-light-absorbing forms. Although the far-red-light-absorbing form, Pfr, is generally thought to be the active form, recent data have suggested that the Pr form may also have an activity (Liscum and Hangarter, 1993; Reed et al., 1994; Shinomura et al., 1994). Light responses that are known to be mediated by phytochromes include

seed germination, chloroplast development, leaf expansion, regulation of gene expression, inhibition of cell elongation, and photoperiodic control of flowering (Mullet, 1988; Chory, 1991; Thompson and White, 1991; Cosgrove, 1994).

*Arabidopsis thaliana* has five genes encoding phytochrome apoproteins, called *PHYA-PHYE* (Sharrock and Quail, 1989). *Arabidopsis* lines carrying mutations in *PHYB* (originally called *hy3*, for the long hypocotyl phenotype by which they were recognized) germinate poorly in red light, have elongated hypocotyls, stems, petioles, and root hairs, accumulate less chlorophyll than the wild type, and flower early (Koornneef et al., 1980; Goto et al., 1991; Reed et al., 1993, 1994; Shinomura et al., 1994). They also elongate to a lesser extent than the wild type in response to supplementary far-red light, implicating *phyB* in control of the shade avoidance response (Nagatani et al., 1991; Whitelam and Smith, 1991). The elongated hypocotyls in these mutants arise primarily from increased cell elongation (Reed et al., 1993). In sorghum, the *ma<sub>3</sub><sup>R</sup>* (maturity) allele causes a phenotype similar to *phyB* in *Arabidopsis* and a deficiency in a light-stable phytochrome (Childs et al., 1992), and was recently shown to be a *phyB* mutation. *Ma<sub>3</sub>* and *PHYB* were found to map to the same location, and the *PHYB* gene from *ma<sub>3</sub><sup>R</sup>* plants has a single base-pair deletion that results in a stop codon in the coding sequence (K.L. Childs, F.R. Miller, M.M. Cordonnier-Pratt, L.H. Pratt, P.W. Morgan, and J.E. Mullet, unpublished data). The *lh* (long hypocotyl) mutant of cucumber, the *lv* mutant of pea, and the *ein* (elongated internode) mutant of *Brassica rapa* may also be *phyB* mutants (Devlin et al., 1992; López-Juez et al., 1992; Weller and Reid, 1993; Weller et al., 1994, 1995). Although these mutants have not been shown to have mutations in a *PHYB* cognate gene, they are each missing a light-stable protein recognized by anti-phytochrome antibodies and have morphological and physiological phenotypes analogous to those of the *phyB* mutants in *Arabidopsis*.

In several plants, alterations in GA metabolism can cause phenotypes that resemble the elongation and flowering phenotypes of the *phyB* mutants. A slender mutant of pea overproduces GAs and has elongated internodes (Reid et al., 1992). The barley *slender* mutants and pea *la cry<sup>s</sup>* mutant are GA-insensitive lines that behave as if constitutively

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Abbreviations: *phyB*, phytochrome B apoprotein; *PHYB*, gene encoding *phyB* apoprotein; *phyB*, mutation in the *PHYB* gene.

activated for GA pathways, and they also elongate excessively and flower early (Potts et al., 1985; Lanahan and Ho, 1988). Moreover, in GA-deficient dwarf varieties of several species, exogenously applied GAs can promote stem elongation, proving that they are required for these responses (Ross, 1994). Induction of flowering by long days in rosette plants has been correlated with increased GA levels (Talon et al., 1991; Zeevaart and Gage, 1993). GA-deficient (*ga*) mutants of *Arabidopsis* flower late in long days and fail to flower at all in short days (Wilson et al., 1992).

The connection between light and GA has also been studied by testing how mutations in light physiology affect GA metabolism. For example, the *ma<sub>3</sub><sup>R</sup>* mutant of sorghum and the *ein* mutant of *Brassica*, which are deficient in phyB, have elevated levels of GAs, suggesting that in these species phyB controls GA levels (Rood et al., 1990a; Beall et al., 1991; Foster et al., 1994). However, more recently it was found that levels of some GAs in sorghum vary according to a diurnal rhythm, and that the *ma<sub>3</sub><sup>R</sup>* mutant was phase-shifted in this rhythm (Foster and Morgan, 1995). Therefore, the increase in GA levels in the *ma<sub>3</sub><sup>R</sup>* mutant may be an indirect consequence of the shifted diurnal rhythm, and average GA levels may not actually be appreciably increased. Similarly, the *ein* mutant has elevated GA levels only under some physiological conditions (Rood et al., 1990b). The cucumber *lh* mutant and the pea *lv* mutant also lack phyB. These mutants have near wild-type levels of GAs (Weller et al., 1994; López-Juez et al., 1995) but show enhanced elongation responses to exogenous GAs (Weller et al., 1994; López-Juez et al., 1995). Moreover, red and far-red light affected the responsiveness of wild-type cucumber seedlings in a manner analogous to the *lh* mutation (López-Juez et al., 1995). Finally, transgenic tobacco lines overexpressing oat phyA have a dwarfed phenotype and lower levels of several GAs (Jordan et al., 1995), suggesting that phyA can inhibit GA biosynthesis when overproduced.

These results suggest that the elongated hypocotyl phenotype of *Arabidopsis phyB* mutants might arise from an increased level of endogenous GAs, or from greater responsiveness to GA. To test these possibilities, we have compared the hypocotyl elongation responses of wild-type and *phyB* seedlings to an inhibitor of GA biosynthesis and to exogenous GAs. We also measured GA levels in *PHYB* and *phyB* *Arabidopsis* seedlings. Our results suggest that, in *Arabidopsis* seedlings (as for pea and cucumber), phyB-signaling affects responsiveness to GAs.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Genetic Material

*Arabidopsis thaliana* mutations *phyB-1* and *phyB-5* are both mutations that are presumed null and have stop codons in the *PHYB* gene (Reed et al., 1993). *phyB-1* was previously called *phyB-Bo64*, and *phyB-5* was called *phyB-8-36* (Quail et al., 1994). The *ga1-3* mutation causes a deletion of most of the *GAI* coding sequence, which causes an almost complete absence of GA (Koornneef et al., 1983; Sun et al., 1992; Zeevaart and Talon, 1992). This line is maintained by ex-

ogenous application of GA<sub>3</sub>. All of these mutations are in the ecotype Landsberg and carry the *erecta* mutation. A *ga1-3 phyB-5* double mutant was constructed by crossing the two single mutants, allowing the F<sub>1</sub> progeny to self-fertilize, and then picking GA-requiring F<sub>3</sub> progeny of a tall (*phyB/phyB*) F<sub>2</sub> plant.

### Growth of Seedlings

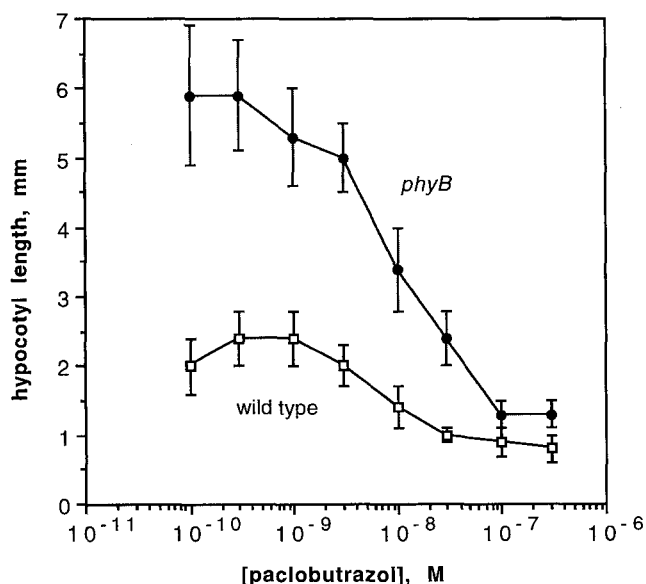
Seeds were surface-sterilized and plated on Murashige-Skoog plates (1× Murashige-Skoog salts [GIBCO], 0.8% phytagar [GIBCO], 1× Gamborg's B5 vitamin mixture [Sigma]), stored overnight at 4°C, and grown in light chambers (16-h day/8-h night) kept at 22°C. Light was from six cool-white fluorescent bulbs (F24T12/CW/HO, Sylvania) and two incandescent bulbs (T10481C, Sylvania) and had a fluence rate of  $3 \times 10^2$  to  $5 \times 10^2 \mu\text{mol m}^{-2} \text{s}^{-1}$ . In some cases, Murashige-Skoog plates were supplemented with 2% Suc. Paclobutrazol (PP333; ICI Americas, Goldsboro, NC) and GA<sub>3</sub> (Sigma) or GA<sub>4</sub> (Kyowa Hakko Kogyo, Tokyo, Japan) were added to the agar immediately before pouring, at the indicated concentrations. Hypocotyl lengths were measured to within 0.2 mm. For GA measurements, seedlings were harvested during the first 4 h of the light period, on d 7 or d 8 after sowing.

### Measurement of GA Levels

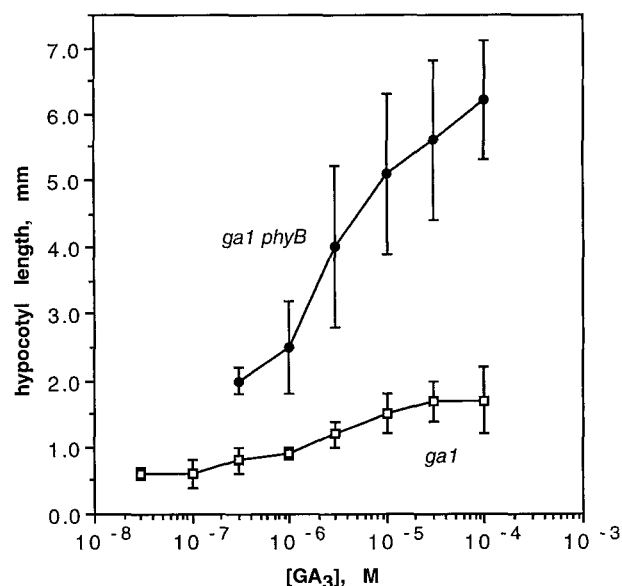
Seedlings were grown on Murashige-Skoog plates, harvested 7 or 8 d after sowing, and lyophilized. Extraction, purification, and GC-MS analysis of GAs was as described previously (Foster et al., 1994). For GC-MS quantitation, 25 ng each of [17,17-<sup>2</sup>H]GA<sub>1</sub>, GA<sub>8</sub>, GA<sub>19</sub>, and GA<sub>20</sub>; 20 ng each of [17,17-<sup>2</sup>H]GA<sub>12</sub> and GA<sub>53</sub>; and 50 ng of [17,17-<sup>2</sup>H]GA<sub>3</sub> were added as internal standards. Amounts of standards to be added were initially chosen based on the GA concentration in adult *Arabidopsis* reported by Talon et al. (1990b) and were used in all subsequent extractions for consistency. All data were corrected for the enrichment of the endogenous GAs by the internal standards. HPLC fractions thought to contain GA<sub>4</sub>, GA<sub>5</sub>, GA<sub>9</sub>, GA<sub>17</sub>, GA<sub>24</sub>, GA<sub>25</sub>, GA<sub>29</sub>, GA<sub>34</sub>, GA<sub>36</sub>, and GA<sub>44</sub> (Hedden, 1987) were analyzed by monitoring the three largest ions from each GA (Hedden, 1987). Deuterated standards were not available to aid in analysis of these GAs. Since we detected GA<sub>4</sub>, GA<sub>29</sub>, and GA<sub>44</sub> in previous studies (Mattheussen et al., 1991), the procedure used (Foster et al., 1994) is adequate for GAs other than those detected. [<sup>3</sup>H]GA<sub>1</sub> and [<sup>3</sup>H]GA<sub>4</sub> were added to samples before extraction to allow pre-GC-MS calculations of recovery; <sup>3</sup>H from both GAs was routinely recovered in HPLC fractions at the appropriate retention times at recoveries of approximately 70% for GA<sub>1</sub> and 60% for GA<sub>4</sub>. In a preliminary experiment with older plants and a 2-fold larger sample than available for the analyses reported in Table I, we detected a weak signal at the proper retention time and Kovat's retention index for GA<sub>4</sub>-methyl-trimethyl silyl. In a few assays, we detected a peak at a position corresponding to the GA<sub>3</sub> standard. However, subsequent analysis revealed this peak to be a contaminant.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To determine the extent to which *phyB* affects GA-dependent hypocotyl elongation, we assessed the ability of various concentrations of the GA biosynthesis inhibitor paclobutrazol to inhibit hypocotyl elongation of wild-type and *phyB* seedlings. Paclobutrazol prevents GA synthesis by inhibiting mono-oxygenases involved in converting *ent*-kaurene to *ent*-kaurenoic acid, an early step in GA biosynthesis (Rademacher, 1989, 1991; Jacobsen and Olszewski, 1993). Figure 1 shows that paclobutrazol inhibited elongation of both wild-type and *phyB* seedling hypocotyls starting at a concentration of about  $10^{-9}$  M paclobutrazol. Higher concentrations of paclobutrazol inhibited elongation of *phyB* hypocotyls to a greater extent than wild-type hypocotyls, but at no concentration were *phyB* seedlings as short as wild-type seedlings. For both genotypes, the concentration of paclobutrazol required to inhibit hypocotyl length to one-half that achieved in the absence of paclobutrazol was about  $2 \times 10^{-8}$  M. Concentrations of paclobutrazol greater than  $10^{-6}$  M inhibited germination of both wild-type and *phyB* mutant seeds, precluding measurement of hypocotyl lengths at this concentration. Thus, the curve for *phyB* is an amplification of the curve for the wild type, and the *phyB* mutation does not shift the curve to higher or lower paclobutrazol concentrations. We were able to restore the full hypocotyl lengths to both wild-type and *phyB* seedlings by including  $GA_4$  in the medium, showing that paclobutrazol inhibited hypocotyl elongation by decreasing GA synthesis (data not shown).



**Figure 1.** Hypocotyl elongation of wild-type and *phyB-5* Arabidopsis seedlings in the presence of exogenous paclobutrazol. Seeds were germinated on Murashige-Skoog/Suc plates containing the indicated concentrations of paclobutrazol, and hypocotyl length measurements were taken 6 d after germination. □, Wild-type (*Landsberg erecta*) seedlings; ●, *phyB-5* seedlings. Error bars indicate sds of measurements. Between 14 and 30 seedlings were measured for each point.

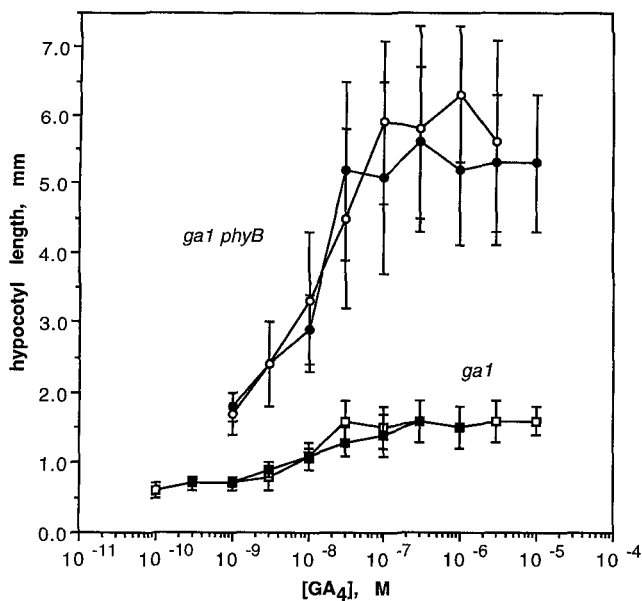


**Figure 2.** Hypocotyl elongation of *ga1-3* and *ga1-3 phyB-5* Arabidopsis seedlings in response to exogenous  $GA_3$ . Seeds were plated on Murashige-Skoog plates containing the indicated concentrations of  $GA_3$ , and hypocotyl length measurements were taken 7 d after germination. □, *ga1-3* seedlings; ●, *ga1-3 phyB-5* seedlings. Error bars indicate sds of measurements. Between 6 and 29 seedlings were measured for each point.

Having established that GA is required for hypocotyl elongation in both wild-type and *phyB* seedlings, we wished to determine whether seedlings of the two genotypes responded differently to equal amounts of exogenous GAs. The *ga1-3* mutation (Koornneef et al., 1983; Sun et al., 1992) prevents GA biosynthesis almost entirely (Zeevaart and Talon, 1992). Figure 2 shows that a *ga1-3 phyB-5* double mutant elongated approximately 3 times as much as a *ga1-3* single mutant in response to exogenous  $GA_3$ . Both lines became taller as  $GA_3$  concentrations in the medium increased from  $3 \times 10^{-7}$  to  $10^{-4}$  M. Below  $3 \times 10^{-7}$  M  $GA_3$ , *ga1-3 phyB-5* seeds germinated poorly, preventing accurate measurement of hypocotyl lengths. We did not test medium concentrations of  $GA_3$  above  $10^{-4}$  M because of limited solubility of  $GA_3$ . We obtained similar results on plates containing Suc (data not shown).

We found that, as for the induction of seed germination (Derkx et al., 1994),  $GA_4$  acted at much lower concentrations than  $GA_3$  for stimulating hypocotyl elongation. As shown in Figure 3, for both genotypes hypocotyl lengths increased as  $GA_4$  concentration in the medium increased from  $10^{-9}$  to  $3 \times 10^{-8}$  M. At  $3 \times 10^{-8}$  M  $GA_4$ , the response for both genotypes appeared to saturate, because higher  $GA_4$  concentrations caused no additional increase in hypocotyl length. These data show that the *phyB* mutation amplifies the elongation response of seedlings to exogenous GAs.

Since the *ga1-3* single-mutant hypocotyl is shorter than the *ga1-3 phyB-5* double-mutant hypocotyl at saturating concentrations of  $GA_4$ , the greater elongation of the *ga1-3 phyB-5* mutant probably does not arise from a higher level



**Figure 3.** Hypocotyl elongation of *ga1-3* and *ga1-3 phyB-5* Arabidopsis seedlings in response to exogenous  $GA_4$ . Seeds were plated on Murashige-Skoog plates containing the indicated concentrations of  $GA_4$ , and hypocotyl length measurements were taken 7 d after germination. Results of two separate experiments are shown. Squares, *ga1-3* seedlings; circles, *ga1-3 phyB-5* seedlings. Error bars indicate SDs of measurements. Between 8 and 48 seedlings were measured for each point.

of active GA. Similarly, we have been unable to cause wild-type seedlings to elongate to the same extent as *phyB* mutant seedlings, even with high exogenous concentrations of GA (data not shown). Taken together, the paclobutrazol inhibition and GA feeding experiments show that GA responses are amplified in the *phyB* mutant background. These data suggest a model whereby GA is re-

quired for hypocotyl elongation and *phyB* acts to change the degree to which the hypocotyl elongates in response to active GA. In this model, *phyB* action might change a component of a GA-signaling pathway or, more likely, affect a distinct, non-GA-limited step in hypocotyl elongation.

Consistent with this model, we failed to detect significant differences in endogenous GA levels between wild-type and *phyB* seedlings. We previously found that the increased hypocotyl length of *phyB* mutant seedlings relative to that of wild-type seedlings arises primarily from increased cell elongation (Reed et al., 1993). Observation of hypocotyl lengths at various times after sowing revealed that the hypocotyls of *phyB* mutant seedlings elongate more quickly than those of the wild type for approximately 7 d after germination, after which time elongation of both strains slows markedly and the difference in hypocotyl elongation rate between wild-type and *phyB* seedlings becomes insignificant (data not shown). Therefore, to maximize the amount of tissue available for GA extractions, we measured GA levels after 7 to 8 d of growth, at the end of the period during which *phyB* seedlings elongate faster than wild-type seedlings.

In both wild-type and *phyB* seedlings we detected GAs in the early 13-hydroxylation pathway of GA synthesis:  $GA_{12}$ ,  $GA_{53}$ ,  $GA_{19}$ ,  $GA_{20}$ ,  $GA_{17}$ , and  $GA_8$ . Levels of all of these were similar in the two genotypes (Table I). The slightly higher  $GA_{20}$  and  $GA_8$  levels in *phyB* than in wild-type seedlings were not statistically significant (Table I). Moreover, we found no difference in the level of the active GA of this pathway,  $GA_1$ .

GAs from the early C-3 hydroxylation pathway and the non-3,13-hydroxylation pathway have also been detected in samples of adult tissue of Arabidopsis (Talon et al., 1990a, 1990b). We attempted but failed to detect some of these in our seedling extracts, namely  $GA_4$ ,  $GA_9$ ,  $GA_{24}$ ,  $GA_{25}$ ,  $GA_{29}$ ,  $GA_{34}$ , and  $GA_{36}$ . We also failed to detect  $GA_{17}$

**Table I.** GA levels in wild-type and *phyB* Arabidopsis seedlings

GA	Experiment <sup>b</sup>	GA Level <sup>a</sup>		<i>phyB</i>	<i>p</i> <sup>c</sup>
		Wild type			
$GA_1$	1	2.5		1.3	0.82
	2	1.3	1.6 ± 0.5	3.5	
	3	1.0		0.8	
$GA_8$	1	2.4		3.1	0.08
	2	2.2	2.2 ± 0.1	4.6	
	3	1.9		3.8	
$GA_{12}$	1	14.5		15.6	
$GA_{19}$	1	2.1		2.3	0.10
	2	3.9	3.0 ± 0.5	4.6	
	3	3.0		3.4	
$GA_{20}$	1	1.1		2.3	0.14
	2	1.9	1.6 ± 0.3	5.2	
	3	1.9		2.8	
$GA_{53}$	1	0.5		0.4	

<sup>a</sup> Shown are measured levels of GAs (in  $ng\ g^{-1}$  dry weight), and means ± SE from the separate experiments. <sup>b</sup> Data from three separate experiments are shown. Tissue was harvested 7 d after germination in experiment 1 and 8 d after germination in experiments 2 and 3. <sup>c</sup> Probability values were calculated using a paired *t* test (*df* = 2). *P* represents the probability that the means of wild type and *phyB* measurements would differ by the amount that they do or more if the actual levels for wild-type and mutant tissue were the same. A *P* value of less than 0.05 would indicate a statistically significant difference.

and GA<sub>44</sub> from the early 13-hydroxylation pathway. These differences from previous reports might reflect differences in GA metabolism between adult and seedling tissue or might be a consequence of the small amounts of tissue we extracted: 0.6 to 2.0 g dry weight compared with 42 to 84 g in the two previous studies (Talon et al., 1990a, 1990b).

Thus, we have found no evidence that the levels of GAs we did detect differ between wild-type and *phyB* seedlings. However, considering that we did not detect GA<sub>4</sub>, and given the low level of exogenous GA<sub>4</sub> needed to induce hypocotyl elongation (see above), it is possible that *phyB* causes significant changes in GA<sub>4</sub> concentrations that we could not detect. We also did not investigate the possibility that *phyB* action might change the distribution of active GAs in seedlings. More detailed studies, perhaps with a larger plant than *Arabidopsis*, might answer these questions more definitively.

As discussed above, the simplest model to explain our data is that *phyB* affects responsiveness to GA. In this model, GA is required for hypocotyl elongation, and *phyB* action modulates the degree of GA-dependent elongation of the hypocotyl. This same model has also been deduced for the interaction of *phyB*-like phytochromes and GAs in pea (Weller et al., 1994) and in cucumber (López-Juez et al., 1995). Raskin and Kende (1984) proposed a similar model for the internode elongation response of submerged deep-water rice. These workers found that GA mediated this elongation and that ethylene (and light) affected the degree to which the stems elongated in response to GAs. In *Thlaspi arvense*, GA and light had distinct effects on petiole elongation: light conditions affected the degree of cell elongation, whereas GAs affected cell division but not cell elongation (Metzger, 1988). It will be interesting to learn whether, in the experiments in *Brassica*, sorghum, and tobacco in which changes in phytochrome activity affected GA levels (Rood et al., 1990a; Beall et al., 1991; Foster et al., 1994; Foster and Morgan, 1995; Jordan et al., 1995), the phenotypic consequences of altered phytochrome activity reflect changes in cell elongation as in the above cases.

The question remains whether other hormones mediate light responses. Both auxins (Law and Davies, 1990; Jones et al., 1991; Behringer and Davies, 1992) and brassinosteroids (Chory et al., 1991; Li et al., 1996; Szekeres et al., 1996) have been implicated in mediating phytochrome responses.

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