In a very interesting recent article ('Who Are The Best Judges Of Theistic Arguments?' *Sophia* 35, 2, 1996, pp.1-12), Mark Nelson argues that the best judges of arguments for the existence of God are theists whose belief in God is properly basic. I propose to take up two questions here. First, does Nelson's argument succeed in establishing his conclusion? Second, if Nelson's argument were successful, what significance would it be appropriate to attribute to his conclusion? I shall begin with a brief rehearsal of his argument, and a discussion of some questions about the proper formulation of his argument which immediately arise.

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Nelson's case proceeds by analogy with the law. The best judges in legal cases are those who are able, honest, and without vested interest in the case at hand. By 'parity of reasoning', the best judges in philosophical cases will be those who are able, honest, and without vested interest in the case at hand. But the only people who are suitably disinterested in the convincingness of arguments for the existence of God are theists who take their belief in God to be properly basic (i.e. theists who believe that God exists, but who do not take the rationality of their belief to depend on the convincingness of any theistic argument). Hence the best judges of arguments
for the existence of God are able, honest theists who take their belief in God to be properly basic.

Following Mavrodes, Nelson says that an argument is convincing just in case it is valid, possesses premises which are known to be true, and possesses premises which are capable of being known independently of knowledge of the conclusion of the argument. On this account, if an argument is convincing it is sound, but there may be many arguments which are sound but not convincing. (In particular, any valid argument from true but not known premises is sound but not convincing.) Initially, Nelson supposed that his judges should simply be judging the soundness of arguments for the existence of God. However, consideration of arguments such as the following:

(1) If 2+2=4, then God exists
(2) 2+2=4
(3) (Therefore) God exists

shows immediately that no reasonable theist can be indifferent to the soundness of all theistic arguments. Unfortunately, this very same example also shows that no reasonable theist can be indifferent to the convincingness of all theistic arguments. First, the argument is valid. (We are free to stipulate that the logic is classical.) Second, reasonable theists seem bound to concede that the premises are known to be true. (Apart from anything else, it seems clear that an omniscient God is bound to know them!) And, third, if God exists, then the premises are capable of being known independently of knowledge of the conclusion of the argument, since one could come to know (1) via the testimony of a reliable informant, and then use (2) to infer (3). (Theists can hardly deny that it is possible to acquire knowledge via testimony; typically, a great deal of religious knowledge is supposed to be acquired in this way.) So it appears that there are good reasons for thinking that no reasonable theist can be indifferent to the convincingness of our sample argument.