Beliefs

VOCABULARY PRACTICE
ADVANCED | C1

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 Match each advanced term with its definition.

1 epistemic authority ____	**a** the perceived right or credibility of a source to determine what counts as true
2 confirmation bias ____	**b** the tendency to favour information confirming existing beliefs
3 cognitive dissonance ____	**c** the mental discomfort of holding contradictory beliefs simultaneously
4 syncretism ____	**d** the blending of different belief systems into a new, combined tradition
5 fundamentalism ____	**e** a strict, literal adherence to foundational religious or ideological principles
6 relativism ____	**f** the view that truth or morality is not absolute but depends on context or perspective
7 apostasy ____	**g** the abandonment or renunciation of a previously held belief or faith
8 hermeneutics ____	**h** the theory and methodology of interpreting texts, especially religious or philosophical ones
9 transcendence ____	**i** a state or experience going beyond ordinary physical or worldly limits
10 secularisation ____	**j** the gradual decline of religious influence in public and institutional life

2 Choose the most precise term for each context.

1 The credibility of a source to determine truth is epistemic authority / personal opinion.

2 Favouring information that confirms existing beliefs is confirmation bias / balanced evaluation.

3 Discomfort from holding contradictory beliefs is cognitive dissonance / settled certainty.

4 The blending of different belief systems is syncretism / strict separation.

5 Strict, literal adherence to foundational principles is fundamentalism / flexible interpretation.

6 The view that truth depends on context is relativism / absolutism.

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7 The renunciation of a previously held faith is apostasy / conversion to it.

8 The methodology of interpreting texts is hermeneutics / casual reading.

3 Match the verbs with the noun phrases to form academic collocations.

1 interrogate ____	**a** competing truth claims
2 reconcile ____	**b** epistemic authority
3 legitimise ____	**c** a received tradition
4 destabilise ____	**d** a moral framework
5 internalise ____	**e** a worldview
6 relativise ____	**f** doctrinal orthodoxy
7 codify ____	**g** ordinary experience
8 transcend ____	**h** cultural difference

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4 Complete the analysis with terms from the box.

apostasy | cognitive dissonance | confirmation bias | epistemic authority | fundamentalism | hermeneutics | relativism | secularisation | syncretism | transcendence

Scholars of religion examine how communities establish 1 _____, determining whose interpretation of a tradition carries legitimate weight. Believers experiencing genuine doubt sometimes report 2 _____, an uncomfortable tension between inherited conviction and emerging scepticism, which 3 _____ can temporarily mask by selectively attending to confirming evidence. Historical encounters between traditions have frequently produced 4 _____, new blended practices combining elements from multiple sources rather than one tradition simply replacing another. In reaction to perceived moral 5 _____, some movements have embraced 6 _____, insisting on strict, literal adherence to foundational texts. The formal discipline of 7 _____ offers tools for interpreting these texts responsibly, though interpretations inevitably vary. Renouncing a previously held faith, termed 8 _____, carries significant social consequences in many communities. Meanwhile, sociologists continue debating whether 9 _____, the declining influence of religion in public life, is a universal, inevitable trend or a pattern specific to particular regions, even as many believers report the experience of genuine 10 _____ remains as vivid as ever.

5 Read the text and answer the questions briefly.

Belief, doubt and epistemic authority

Philosophers of religion increasingly examine how individuals navigate doubt within communities that expect firm conviction, noting that public expressions of certainty often mask considerable private uncertainty. Cognitive dissonance theory suggests that believers experiencing doubt may unconsciously employ confirmation bias, selectively attending to supportive evidence while discounting contradictory information, partly to reduce psychological discomfort. This dynamic complicates simple narratives about belief and apostasy, since a person's outward religious identity may persist even as private conviction fluctuates considerably over time. Understanding epistemic authority, therefore, requires attention not merely to official doctrine but to how ordinary believers actually reason through uncertainty in practice.

1 What do philosophers of religion increasingly examine? _____

2 What do public expressions of certainty often mask? _____

3 What does cognitive dissonance theory suggest believers experiencing doubt may do? _____

4 Why might they employ confirmation bias? _____

5 What does this dynamic complicate? _____

6 What does understanding epistemic authority require attention to, beyond official doctrine? ____

6 Replace the words in bold with a precise term or collocation.

1 She felt uncomfortable tension holding two contradictory beliefs. _____

2 The new practice blended elements from two different traditions. _____

3 He renounced his previously held faith publicly. _____

4 The movement insisted on strict, literal adherence to foundational texts. _____

OVER TO YOU

Write a 160-190 word critical commentary on how individuals navigate doubt and certainty within belief systems, distinguishing observation from inference.

[ ] Use at least twelve target expressions. [ ] Include four academic collocations. [ ] Maintain a precise, balanced register.

ANSWER KEY

1 Advanced terms

1 a 2 b 3 c 4 d 5 e 6 f 7 g 8 h 9 i 10 j

2 Precise terms

1 epistemic authority 2 confirmation bias 3 cognitive dissonance 4 syncretism 5 fundamentalism 6 relativism 7 apostasy 8 hermeneutics

3 Academic collocations

1 b interrogate epistemic authority 2 a reconcile competing truth claims 3 f legitimise doctrinal orthodoxy 4 c destabilise a received tradition
5 e internalise a worldview 6 h relativise cultural difference... note adjust 7 d codify a moral framework 8 g transcend ordinary experience

4 Analysis

1 epistemic authority 2 cognitive dissonance 3 confirmation bias 4 syncretism 5 relativism
6 fundamentalism 7 hermeneutics 8 apostasy 9 secularisation 10 transcendence

5 Reading - suggested answers

1 How individuals navigate doubt within communities that expect firm conviction.
2 Considerable private uncertainty.
3 Unconsciously employ confirmation bias.
4 Partly to reduce psychological discomfort.
5 Simple narratives about belief and apostasy.
6 How ordinary believers actually reason through uncertainty in practice.

6 Precise terms and collocations

1 cognitive dissonance 2 syncretism 3 apostasy 4 fundamentalism

Over to you

Answers will vary. Look for conceptual precision, evidence-aware reasoning and balanced evaluation.