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UPSC Mains 2021 Essay

Year-wise PYQ pack · WRAP model answers with canonical links

Official UPSC stems in exam order. Each live answer sits on one WRAP URL; this PDF is the year pack, not a second copy of the article. Open the link under a question for the full page.

<https://wrapexams.com/upsc/mains/essay/2021/>

Q1 · 125 marks

The process of self-discovery has now been technologically outsourced.

Essay · 2021 · Philosophical and ethical quotes

Revision summary

Not a full essay - a map.

- **Open with a personality-app in a hostel. Stand:** tools serve; they must not be the self.
- **Headings:** person, market, ID, school, then one counter.

Earn **Gandhi** once. Peg Aadhaar or a feed.

Close on attention as practice.

Note

This is a map, not the full 1,000-1,200 word essay.

Anecdote

- **A student asks an app who he is:** a colour, a career, a 'personality type' in four letters. The app is quick. The boy is relieved. Self-discovery has been outsourced like a form filled by a kiosk. The topic is that relief - and its bill.

One stand

Technology can mirror; it also sells a self. Write to keep instruments (a test, a census, a therapy app) as servants, and to refuse a life whose meaning is a dashboard.

Heading map

What the line is asking

- **Self-discovery:** conscience, craft, a history of one's own harm and gifts.
- **Outsourced:** Myers-briggs-as-fate, a feed, a match, an ancestor-DNA kit, a ranking.
- **Now:** speed and scale, not the first mirror in history (astrology was an older kiosk).

Self

- We rent an identity because making one is slow. **Gandhi's** experiments cannot be an API.

Market

- The attention industry profits from a self that is never done - FOMO's cousin.
- Coaching that sells a rank as a soul.

State

- **Aadhaar, a ration card, a caste certificate:** necessary papers. They are not the person.
- **A social-credit fantasy:** the republic must not become the app.

Education

- Marks as a proxy for worth. NEP's claim vs the kiosk in the hostel.

The counter

A first-generation student needs a map the family cannot give - a lecture, a test, even an app that names depression. Outsourcing a tool is not the sin; outsourcing judgment is. Therapy and diagnostics can be mercy. The line targets the sale of a finished self, not the stethoscope.

Last paragraph

- **Close:** use the mirror; do not move into it. Expand - this is only the map.

Open WRAP page — <https://wrapexams.com/upsc/mains-answers/essay/2021/the-process-of-self-discovery-has-now-been-technologically-outsourced/>

Q2 · 125 marks

Your perception of me is a reflection of you; my reaction to you is an awareness of me.

Essay · 2021 · Philosophical and ethical quotes

Revision summary

Not a full essay - a map.

- **Open with 'you people' and a later noting. Stand:** two mirrors; only one is yours to wash.
- **Headings:** self, rumour, office, world, then one counter.

Earn one Vedanta or **Gandhi** line. Peg a reasoned file.

Close on the second glance.

Note

This is a map, not the full 1,000-1,200 word essay.

Anecdote

A new officer hears 'you people' in a teashop and burns. Later he hears the same shape of sentence in his own noting about a village. The first insult showed the shop. The second sentence showed him. The line is that double pane.

One stand

Perception is often projection. Reaction is character. Write to use the first clause against prejudice, and the second against the cult of blame.

Heading map

What the line is asking

- **Your perception of me:** bias, caste-eye, a feed's stereotype, a lover's hope.
- **My reaction:** the only pane I can wash today.
- Vedanta / a modern therapy cousin - one honest nod, not a gurudom.

Self

- We meet our own fear in the other's face. A pause is the washcloth.

Society

- A rumour about a community is a portrait of the rumourer.
- **Still:** the target's anger is data, not 'their karma'. The first clause must not gaslight.

Office

- A file that 'sees' a petitioner as a type. 360-degree feedback as a civic mirror.
- **Police reform:** the public's perception is also a portrait of the khaki - sometimes earned.

World

- A country's 'image' campaign vs how it treats a student at a visa counter.

The counter

A Dalit's testimony is not 'a reflection of the listener' in the sense that it can be dismissed. Some perceptions are true because they tracked a fact. The line is about distortion, not about

dissolving the world into mood. Keep a stubborn outer event (a blow, a law).

Last paragraph

- **Close:** wash the pane you hold. Expand - this is only the map.

Open WRAP page — <https://wrapexams.com/upsc/mains-answers/essay/2021/your-perception-of-me-is-a-reflection-of-you-my-reaction-to-you-is-an-awareness-of-me/>

WRAP Exams

Q3 · 125 marks

Philosophy of wantlessness is Utopian, while materialism is a chimera.

Essay · 2021 · Philosophical and ethical quotes

Revision summary

Not a full essay - a map.

- **Open with sadhu-poster and mall-ad on one bus. Stand:** enough, not none, not endless.
- **Headings:** self, growth, planet, welfare, then one counter.

Earn **Gandhi** and **Buddha** or **Ambedkar**.

Close on floor plus less theatre.

Note

This is a map, not the full 1,000-1,200 word essay.

Anecdote

A sadhu on a poster; a mall on the other wall of the same bus. One says want nothing. One says want this. Both are selling a freeze-frame. The line names them: Utopia and chimera. A clerk between the ads has rent due on Tuesday.

One stand

Gandhi's need-not-greed is not wantlessness. A floor of nutrition is not materialism. Write the chimera of GDP-as-self and the Utopia of a nation of saints - then a livable middle.

Heading map

What the line is asking

- **Wantlessness:** a spiritual extreme - also a lecture the comfortable give the hungry.
- **Materialism:** things as the only real; a chimera because the hole is not shaped like a car.
- **Utopian / chimera:** both fail as sole public philosophy.

Self

- Santosh vs a wedding chandelier (cousin of **Socrates** 2025). **Buddha's** tanha.

Economy

- Growth that lifts a floor is not a chimera; growth as identity is.
- **Peg:** undernutrition beside luxury housing - two errors in one republic.

Ecology

- Endless more is a chimera the planet will not fund. IPCC as a physical veto.

State

- Welfare is not anti-spiritual; it is how wantlessness is not forced on the landless.
- **Conspicuous official spend:** materialism in khaki and khadi.

The counter

- **Ambedkar:** a hungry man is not 'simple'. Do not baptise poverty as wantlessness. And do not baptise a billionaire's ashram as the middle path. Rights first; then talk of enough.

Last paragraph

- **Close:** raise the floor, lower the theatre. Expand - this is only the map.

Open WRAP page — <https://wrapexams.com/upsc/mains-answers/essay/2021/philosophy-of-wantlessness-is-utopian-while-materialism-is-a-chimera/>

WRAP Exams

Q4 · 125 marks

The real is rational and the rational is real.

Essay · 2021 · Philosophical and ethical quotes

Revision summary

Not a full essay - a map.

- **Open with a whiteboard scheme vs a closed shop. Stand:** facts must justify; ideas must land.
- **Headings:** knowledge, law, history, policy, then one counter.

Earn **Hegel** once (honestly); **Ambedkar** once.

Close on reason that can bleed.

Note

This is a map, not the full 1,000-1,200 word essay.

Anecdote

A perfect scheme on a whiteboard does not open a ration shop. A custom 'that has always been' does not become just by lasting. **Hegel's** sentence is a dare: make the real defend itself, and make the rational walk in dust.

One stand

- **Do not write a German philosophy paper. Translate:** a republic tests facts with reasons, and tests reasons with facts. Constitutional morality is that habit.

Heading map

What the line is asking

- **Real is rational:** the actual order can be understood - and must be justifiable, not only endured.
- **Rational is real:** a good idea wants institutions, a budget, a queue that exists.
- **Risk:** the line has been abused to bless whatever exists (the state as Reason). Name that abuse.

Knowledge

- A theory that cannot meet a trial is not yet real. A superstition that 'works' socially is not yet rational.

Law

- A custom of exclusion is real; it is not therefore right. **Ambedkar** against that Hegelian temptation.
- A beautiful right that never funds a court is rational on paper only.

History

- 1947's promise vs 2020s' files. The real must keep answering.

Policy

- UPI became real because the rails were. A 'logical' farm law that missed the mandi was not yet real.

The counter

Grief is real and not a syllogism. Power will call itself Reason (Emergency as logic of order). The scientific doubter and the last person's experience are the checks. Keep a stubborn pain that theory must serve, not absorb.

Last paragraph

- **Close:** if it exists, make it answer; if it is right, make it exist in a queue. Expand - this is only the map.

Open WRAP page —

<https://wrapexams.com/upsc/mains-answers/essay/2021/the-real-is-rational-and-the-rational-is-real/>

WRAP Exams

Q5 · 125 marks

Hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.

Essay · 2021 · Philosophical and ethical quotes

Revision summary

Not a full essay - a map.

- **Open with a night bus and a pretty cage. Stand:** care is power; do not freeze the carer.
- **Headings:** home, time-use, panchayat, law, then one counter.

Earn the proverb once; **Ambedkar** or a labour peg.

Close on sharing the cradle.

Note

This is a map, not the full 1,000-1,200 word essay.

Anecdote

- **A night bus:** a woman stands with a sleeping child so a man can sit with a phone. Tomorrow she will be told she 'rules the world' from the kitchen. The proverb can be honour. It can also be a pretty cage. Write to keep the honour and break the cage.

One stand

Early care shapes a people - language, shame, a taste for cruelty or kindness. That is power. It must be visible in GDP, in paternity leave, in a creche, not only in a greeting card.

Heading map

What the line is asking

- **Cradle:** childhood, unpaid care, the first republic.
- **Rules the world:** influence on character, labour supply, even a vote twenty years later.
- **Risk:** a compliment that refuses a salary, a seat, a street at night.

Home

- Who rocks, who is free to wander (cousin of 2023 restrictions/demands).

Economy

- **Peg:** time-use surveys - hours that do not enter GDP.
- A missing creche is an industrial policy.

Polity

- The first school of citizenship is the home. A violent cradle exports a violent street.
- **Women in panchayats:** ruling more than the cradle - still fighting the proxy.

Law

- **Maternity benefit, POSH, Art. 15:** the republic entering the house.
- Childcare as infrastructure, not a private hobby.

The counter

Not every hand that rocks is kind (abuse is also a cradle). And men who never rock still rule boards. The proverb is a claim about influence, not a census of cabinets. Honour care by

redistributing it - including to the state.

Last paragraph

- **Close:** count the hours, share the night bus. Expand - this is only the map.

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<https://wrapexams.com/upsc/mains-answers/essay/2021/hand-that-rocks-the-cradle-rules-the-world/>

WRAP Exams

Q6 · 125 marks

What is research, but a blind date with knowledge!

Essay · 2021 · Philosophical and ethical quotes

Revision summary

Not a full essay - a map.

- **Open with a data file that will not flirt. Stand:** encounter plus method.
- **Headings:** lab, pilot, archive, AI, then one counter.

Earn Feynman once. Peg a trial or census.

Close on curiosity with consent.

Note

This is a map, not the full 1,000-1,200 word essay.

Anecdote

A PhD student opens a file she did not write. The data will not flirt back as planned. That awkwardness is the point. Research is a blind date with knowledge - you dress, you show up, you do not get to pick the ending in advance.

One stand

- **Blind:** we do not know. Date: we still prepare, listen, leave when it is wrong. Write against both the know-it-all file and the conspiracy that 'research' means a bought result.

Heading map

What the line is asking

- **Blind date:** uncertainty, surprise, chemistry that may fail.
- **Knowledge:** not a download; an encounter.
- **Tone:** playful, then serious.

Science

- Hypothesis as a profile; experiment as the meeting. Replication as asking a friend if it was true.
- **Peg:** a vaccine trial; an ISRO anomaly - the date going badly, then well.

Policy

- A pilot scheme is a chaperoned date. Scaling without evaluation is a forced marriage.
- **Census** as a national date with ourselves.

History and society

- Archives surprise. A 'glorious past' that never shows up is a catfish.

Digital

- An AI summary is not the date; it is a friend's gossip. The primary source still has to walk in.

The counter

Some dates should not happen - a trial without consent, a study on the poor as if they were a buffet. Ethics boards are the streetlight. And 'blind' is not 'ignorant of harm'. Precaution is part of showing up dressed.

Last paragraph

- **Close:** keep the protocol, keep the wonder. Expand - this is only the map.

Open WRAP page —

<https://wrapexams.com/upsc/mains-answers/essay/2021/what-is-research-but-a-blind-date-with-knowledge/>

WRAP Exams

Q7 · 125 marks

History repeats itself, first as a tragedy, second as a farce.

Essay · 2021 · Philosophical and ethical quotes

Revision summary

Not a full essay - a map.

- **Open with a funeral and a later meme. Stand:** reruns of power; memory as duty.
- **Headings:** politics, riot/pandemic, inquiry, media, then one counter.

Earn **Marx** once. Peg a commission that became ritual.

Close on a notebook, not fatalism.

Note

This is a map, not the full 1,000-1,200 word essay.

Anecdote

A riot's first season is a funeral. A decade later the same rumour wears a meme. The bodies can rhyme. **Marx** said the second time is farce. Farce here is not funny. It is tragedy in costume.

One stand

Repetition is a failure of institutions, not a law of nature. Write the costume (farce) as a warning: we have seen the plot. Then refuse fatalism - the play can be stopped.

Heading map

What the line is asking

- **Tragedy:** a first collapse with a kind of dignity or shock.
- **Farce:** the copy, the parody, the strongman as a rerun.
- **Marx** on Napoleon III - one honest mention, then India.

Politics

- Emergency's shadow; a later year that rhymes in smaller type.
- Strongman theatre as farce that still jails.

Society

- Partition's tragedy; later riots as a script someone kept.
- A pandemic wave we had already been shown.

Policy

- A bridge that falls twice. An inquiry that becomes a ritual - farce as procedure.

Media

- The rumour's second life is faster. Farce at 5G speed.

The counter

Not everything that looks alike is a repeat (a protest is not a riot because a channel says so). And the oppressed repeating a demand is not farce; it is unfinished justice. **Marx's** joke is aimed at power's reruns, not at a hunger that still knocks.

Last paragraph

- **Close:** keep a national notebook of first tragedies so the costume does not fool us. Expand - this is only the map.

Open WRAP page — <https://wrapexams.com/upsc/mains-answers/essay/2021/history-repeats-itself-first-as-a-tragedy-second-as-a-farce/>

WRAP Exams

Q8 · 125 marks

There are better practices to "best practices"

Essay · 2021 · Philosophical and ethical quotes

Revision summary

Not a full essay - a map.

- **Open with copied paint and an uncopied well. Stand:** fit over a branded summit.
- **Headings:** panchayat, health, rails, school, then one counter.

Earn one humble line. Peg NREGA or UPI.

Close on revisable doing.

Note

This is a map, not the full 1,000-1,200 word essay.

Anecdote

A mission visits a 'model village' and copies the paint. The well was the practice. The paint was the photograph. 'Best practices' arrived in a spiral-bound book. The better practice would have been to sit at the well until the water explained itself.

One stand

A best practice is a claim of a summit. Better practices are a slope - context, caste, rainfall, a language. Write against both NIMBY pride and a McKinsey tattoo.

Heading map

What the line is asking

- **Best:** a superlative that travels badly.
- **Better:** comparative, local, reversible.
- **Practices:** doing, not a slide.

Administration

- A 73rd panchayat that works in one block and fails as a photocopy.
- **Lateral entry, a dashboard:** tools, not relics.

Development

- Kerala's public health vs a desert district - steal the nurse ratio, not the coconut.
- **Peg:** NREGA's local lists vs a uniform app that cannot see a hill.

Tech

- UPI as a public rail others now study - a practice that fit a habit of small cash.
- A facial-recognition 'best practice' that does not fit a constitutional face.

School

- Finland in a PowerPoint; a mid-day meal that actually arrives is better here.

The counter

- **Some practices are close to universal:** wash hands, a fair trial, a vaccine cold chain.
- 'Context' must not excuse a dirty OT. The line rebukes cargo-cult superlatives, not standards.

Also: the poor deserve the well, not only a unique local poetry of thirst.

Last paragraph

- **Close:** sit at the well; then write a practice that can fail and be rewritten. Expand - this is only the map.

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<https://wrapexams.com/upsc/mains-answers/essay/2021/there-are-better-practices-to-best-practices/>

WRAP Exams

Compiled answer key

Last pages of this pack. Each question links to the WRAP model answer on wrapexams.com.

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Q1 125 marks	Q2 125 marks	Q3 125 marks	Q4 125 marks
Q5 125 marks	Q6 125 marks	Q7 125 marks	Q8 125 marks

Question-wise key

Q1 · 125 marks Solution

Q2 · 125 marks Solution

Q3 · 125 marks Solution

Q4 · 125 marks Solution

Q5 · 125 marks Solution

Q6 · 125 marks Solution

Q7 · 125 marks Solution

Q8 · 125 marks Solution

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