

Martin Luther King Day 2025

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From Futility Closet:¹

A Lesson

John Alexander Smith, Waynflete Professor of Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy at Oxford, opened a course of lectures in 1914 with these words:²

“Gentlemen — you are now about to embark upon a course of studies which will occupy you for two years. Together, they form a noble adventure. But I would like to remind you of an important point. Some of you, when you go down from the University, will go into the Church, or to the Bar, or to the House of Commons, to the Home Civil Service, to the Indian and Colonial Services, or into various professions. Some may go into the Army, some into industry and commerce; some may become country gentlemen. A few — I hope a very few — will become teachers or dons. Let me make this clear to you. Except for the last category, nothing that you will learn in the course of your studies will be of the slightest possible use to you in after life — save only this — that if you work hard and intelligently you should be able to detect *when a man is talking rot*, and that, in my view, is the main, if not the sole, purpose of education.”

¹ <https://www.futilitycloset.com/2025/01/05/a-lesson/>

² <https://archive.org/details/oxfordbeforedelu0000unse/page/38/mode/2up>