What if a man with an ax in his hand and evil in his expression demands to know where your friend is? Do you tell the truth or tell a lie? This poses an ethical dilemma to someone who believes in always telling the truth. In Goethe’s *Faust* and Ibsen’s *The Wild Duck*, two great writers challenge any simplistic analysis of virtue. Phenomenology, a complex conceptual framework, can deal with the complexity of the ethical choices made in these two plays.

Hubert Dreyfus cites a striking example from Immanuel Kant that ethics cannot be a simple matter of following rules such as “never lie”: “Faced with the dilemma posed by Kant—an avowed killer asking the whereabouts of the child’s friend—the child might tell the truth.” Dreyfus (1989) continues, “After experiencing regret and guilt over the death of the friend, however, the child would move toward the realization that the rule, ‘Never lie,’ . . . needs to be contextualized” (p. 8). Kant draws his example from the profound end of the spectrum of possibilities; near the other end of the spectrum of possible issues of lying, we find answers to such questions as, “How do you like my new hat or haircut?” in which it would be ridiculous to insist on following the rule “never lie.” A move to a higher level of conceptualization is needed to guide us as to when it is ethical to lie and when it is necessary to tell the truth. In *The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant suggests a three-step procedure: (1) forming maxims such as “Never lie except when an innocent person will be harmed by the truth,” (2) transforming the maxim into a universal law, and (3) following the law only in the cases in which it contains no logical contradiction and we can logically will that the law be applied universally. However, Dreyfus points out that the maxim also “will, under some circumstances, lead to regret.” Therefore, he claims, “Finally, with enough experience, the ethical expert would learn to tell the truth or lie, depending upon the situation, without appeal to rules and maxims” (p. 9).
Dreyfus reaches these ideas by following three “methodological precautions”:

1. We should begin by describing our everyday, ongoing ethical coping.
2. We should determine under which conditions deliberation and choice appear.
3. We should beware of making the typical philosophical mistake of reading the structure of deliberation and choice back into our account of everyday coping. (p. 3)

Relying on these guidelines, Dreyfus says that he “will lay out a phenomenological description of five stages in the development of expertise, using driving and chess as examples” (p. 3). In this essay, I will limit the examples to driving and refer the reader directly to Dreyfus’ article for the parallel chess-learning examples. Using the driving example, Dreyfus develops what he calls “A Phenomenology of Skill Acquisition” (p. 3). This can then be applied to the acquisition of ethical expertise. I will supply examples from literature that, I hope, make Dreyfus’s point specific.

Dreyfus’s five stages are as follows.

In stage 1, “Novice,” the “student automobile driver learns to recognize such interpretation-free features as speed (indicated by his speedometer). Timing of gear shifts is specified in terms of speed” (p. 3). The person follows rules, such as shift to second gear at five miles per hour, to third gear at fifteen miles per hour, and so on. We can see a literary example of stage 1 thinking in William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*. Here a group of boys crash land on an island with no adults and make their own rules. The first is that no one can speak at the assembly unless he is holding the conch, a shell that a boy named Ralph had used as a trumpet to call the other boys to a gathering. Another boy, Jack, “was on his feet. ‘We’ll have rules!’ he cried excitedly. ‘Lots of rules!’” (Golding, 1997, pp. 32–33). Although Golding presents an example of communal rule creation, the example externalizes the internal situation of a person beginning to develop a self-governing ethical system. The novel depicts what happens when even this elementary ethical system breaks down. Toward the end, a boy called Piggy asks “Which is better—to have rules and agree, or to hunt and kill” (p. 208). “Which is better, law and rescue, or hunting and breaking things up?” (p. 208). Roger gives the answer of the wild pack of boys. He rolls a boulder down a hill and kills Piggy.

In stage 2, “Advanced Beginner,” the person progresses from following strict rules to forming “situational maxims” for herself—learning, for example, to “shift up when the motor sounds like it is racing and down when it sounds like it is straining” (Dreyfus, 1989, p. 4). In Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, for example, Nora reveals a “when x happens, I will do y” strategy that is analogous to what I take Dreyfus to be describing. Nora tells Christine that she will help her old friend get a job in the bank where Nora’s husband will