In an essay written in 1798, Kant asks: “Is the human race progressing”? “If so, how can we know this?” These questions give rise to a host of others: If the human race is progressing, what are the mechanisms responsible for that progress, and what kind of progress are we talking about? Is the thesis of progress historically justifiable, or is it merely a product of speculation, intended to console us and give us hope? If writing and thinking about history is not meant thus to provide us with a hopeful sense of trajectory, what other purposes can it or does it serve? We will consider some classic philosophical treatments of these and other questions.