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Special values of L-functions up close and from afar

L-functions are generalizations of the Riemann zeta function and play a central role in our understanding of certain arithmetic objects. In this talk we will introduce these objects and some of their amazing properties. We will see two points of view for understanding their special values: looking at them individually (for example, as arising from regulators and Mahler measure) and looking at them in families and studying their distribution (for example, by using moments).