Course Description

Paradoxes are cases in which we are led to an apparently unacceptable or absurd conclusion through apparently solid logical reasoning.

Consider, for instance the following statement: “This sentence is false.” If the sentence is true, then it must be false! However, if the sentence is false, then it must be true . . . in which case it is false! But how can that be?

“Pegasus does not exist” is apparently a true statement. But how can that sentence say something true or even meaningful if there exists nothing for it to speak of in the first place?

Our world and everything in it is apparently in motion. But to move from point A to point B, one first has to travel half of that distance. And to travel half of that distance, one must first traverse half of that half, and so on. Given that an infinite series of points lie between any point A and point B, though, how can even the smallest distance be traversed in a finite amount of time?

This class is an examination of (in)famous paradoxes both ancient and modern. We’ll examine paradoxes of truth and meaning, space and time, probability and knowledge. What do these paradoxes ultimately show us? Do they reveal hidden inconsistencies in our logic? Fundamental limits to our knowledge? Or simply that the universe is much stranger place than we ordinarily take it to be?

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