Wednesday, April 26, 2023, 15-17 CEST

Selene Arfini (University of Pavia)
"Becoming Ignorant: How to Speak of To-Ignorance Cognitive Processes"

There is a gap in the English language that is interestingly telling of our ability to speak about ignorance. While there are at least a few words that can describe how agents acquire knowledge – through learning, studying, insight, understanding – we do not have the same verbal capacity to describe how agents end up being ignorant. At best, we can say people forgot or unlearned something or we can say that they ignore something, but these words do not really describe the processes in which ignorance is the outcome. In fact, they are only used to describe their final epistemic state. The question at this point is: does this lack of terms reflect a lack of epistemological possibility or a lack of lexicon? Are we unable to progressively become ignorant or are we only limited in the way we speak about it?
In this article I address these questions by discussing "to-ignorance processes" – which I will describe as processes that allow people to shift from a state of partial knowledge or unaware ignorance to another state of ignorance (of which they could be conscious of or not). I will argue that these processes affect how cognitive agents encounter new information and, while they can also result in positive epistemic outcomes (as curiosity or insight), they also may partially explain some pressing socio-epistemological problems, such as the diffusion of fake news.