

Department of Cultural Studies, Department
of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, CPU in Nitra

in cooperation with the Slovak Philosophical
Association at the Slovak Academy of Sciences

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PhD., President of the Slovak Philosophical Association
at the Slovak Academy of Sciences

A ROMAN ETHICAL NOTION: DIGNITAS

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My paper will focus on the roman ethical notion of dignitas, which has not received the attention it deserves, despite the enormous work being done on ancient ethics and despite the fact that this is a notion that we, moderns, have inherited from antiquity and it is part of our conceptual framework in ethical discussions today. I will argue that this is a roman notion that has no equivalent in the ancient Greek ethics, which developed from a notion of social ranking to a universal ethical notion. The crucial transition took place in Cicero's philosophical works, namely the De finibus and De officiis. In these works, however, dignitas is not an inherent property that applies universally to all humans; for Cicero rather dignitas is tightly connected to human virtue, and as such we can either maintain it or lose it. Unlike the modern notion of 'dignity' that pertains to all men independently from their characters, views, or deeds, which can never be lost and from which certain rights arise for every individual, the ancient dignitas is an ethical concept from which certain duties arise for the individual who wants to maintain it.

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