

Elemental Dignities – Pentacles Focus Card

Golden Dawn Rules as published by Israel Regardie:

A card is strong or weak, well-dignified or ill-dignified, according to the cards which are next to it on either side. (Commentary: The wording here is a bit ambiguous: does “either side” mean “one side or the other” or “both sides?” Current practice favors the latter, as does some of the following explanatory text; different rules apply to two-card combinations)

Cards of the same suit on either side strengthen it greatly either for good or evil, according to their nature. (Commentary: This seems to be what is meant by “according to their nature:” Pentacles or Earth cards of a beneficial nature on both sides of the 6 of Pentacles would greatly strengthen its positive expression [“strengthen it for good”]; less beneficial cards would still strengthen it, but not as much. Difficult Pentacles or Earth cards on opposite sides of the 5 of Pentacles would greatly exaggerate its negative nature [“strengthen it for evil”]; less difficult cards would mitigate the negative reinforcement. A disparity in the non-elemental qualities between the surrounding Water cards would require judgment as to which emphasis prevails. One method would be to use “rank preference:” Majors “trump” Courts and Minors; Courts trump Minors.)

Cards of the suit answering to its contrary element, on either side, weaken it greatly for good or evil. (Commentary: Wands or Fire cards of a beneficial nature on both sides of the 5 of Cups would weaken [“water down”] its negative expression [“weaken it for good”], while more difficult cards would bolster that negativity and let its full force come through [“weaken it for evil”].)

Air and Earth are contraries as are Fire and Water. Air is friendly with Water and Fire, and Fire with Air and Earth. (Commentary: The doubling-up of “friendly” suits here is misleading; elsewhere, Air and Water are described as “neutral and supportive” (“strengthening” but not “friendly”) as are Fire and Earth. These pairs are both of opposite polarity: in elemental terms, Air is positive and active, Water is negative and passive, while Fire and Earth have the same distinction. This is a far cry from the “friendly” combinations of Fire and Air or Water and Earth. It would probably be better to consider the “neutral” pairs as complementary opposites, since each has a quality the other lacks: Air is intellectually incisive, Water is emotionally sensitive; Fire can be forcefully assertive, Earth is laconic and benign. These extremes when combined can have an offsetting but also balancing effect on the focus card that is not purely inert, casting it in a more complex light that perhaps creates an opportunity to “deepen” rather than “strengthen” its expression. This leaves us with two actively “friendly” and mutually empowering pairs, two “unfriendly” and mutually debilitating pairs, and two “complementary” and mutually opportunistic pairs)

If a card of the suit of Wands falls between a Cup and a Sword, the Sword modifies and connects the Wand with the Cup, so that it is not weakened by its vicinity, but is modified by the influence of both cards; therefore fairly strong. (Commentary: The upshot seems to be that, although the Cup is unfriendly to the Wand, it is “friendly” - I would call it “complementary” - to the Sword, which in turn is quite friendly to the Wand, two positives outweigh the one negative. Since I see this more as a “mixed dignity” situation, I would call it a modest opportunity rather than a “fairly strong” benefit.)

But if a card pass between two which are naturally contrary, it is not affected by either much as a Wand between a Sword and Pentacle which latter, being Air and Earth, are contrary and therefore weaken each other. (Commentary: The idea here is that the two modifiers, being “unfriendly,” cancel one another out, leaving no residual effect on the central Wand. This means that, categorically, the only time

we will get an “ill-dignified” situation occurs when we have a Wand surrounded by two Cups; a Cup surrounded by two Wands; a Sword surrounded by two Pentacles; or a Pentacle surrounded by two Swords. There seems to be room for a more nuanced interpretation here, as we will see in the next set of “rules;” the Sword would be very friendly to the Wand and the Pentacle would be its “complementary opposite,” so it seems a determination of “moderately dignified” would be appropriate rather than completely unaffected)

The following is (I believe) from Jim Esheleman's College of Thelema website.

The Four Elements interact with each other using simple and easy to learn rules:

1. Fire and Air are friendly and active
2. Water and Earth are friendly and passive
3. Fire and Water are enemies; they weaken each other
4. Air and Earth are enemies; they weaken each other
5. Fire and Earth strengthen each other but are neutral
6. Water and Air strengthen each other but are neutral.

Rules 1 and 2 show the strongest combination. Rules 3 and 4 show the weakest combinations. Rules 5 and 6 are somewhere in between. The reason is they combine Active and Passive. If you can remember Rule 1, and you know that Fire and Air are active, while Water and earth are passive, you can work out all the other rules easily. There is very little to remember!

Using Elemental Dignities, the permutations of the fundamental attributions of the Tarot cards, the four elements, are more important than the divinatory meanings.

(In three card combinations) each of the three cards has equal status, but the elemental interaction between them reveals a subtler picture and a distinct change of emphasis that differs when you permute these cards. To make it easier on yourself, you take the center card to be the Principle, and the outer cards are Modifiers, but remember all three are interacting between themselves.

Analysis of the three-card combinations gives you the opportunity to see whether the energy is blocked, flows easily, is enhanced or diminished, or even transformed. You can see if the Subject (Principal) is supported by the Modifiers, or whether the Modifiers are working together or against themselves. EDs somehow create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Permutations of the Pentacles focus card (general dignities by suit):

Earth-Earth-Earth:	Well-dignified
Earth-Earth-Fire:	Well-dignified per GD; complementary opposites produce opportunity
Earth-Earth-Water:	Well-dignified
Earth-Earth-Air:	Neutral per GD; strengthened by “energy flow” (2 Earths trump 1 Air)
Fire-Earth-Earth:	Well-dignified per GD; complementary opposites produce opportunity
Water-Earth-Earth:	Well-dignified
Air-Earth-Earth:	Neutral per GD; strengthened by “energy flow” (2 Earths trump 1 Air)
Fire-Earth-Fire:	Well-dignified
Fire-Earth-Water:	Neutral per GD; moderately strong due to compatibility of individual suits to Earth
Fire-Earth-Air:	Fairly strong per GD; Air and Fire combine to offset Air-Earth weakness
Water-Earth-Fire:	Neutral per GD; moderately strong due to compatibility of individual suits to Earth

Water-Earth-Air:	Well-dignified per GD; complementary opposites produce opportunity
Air-Earth-Fire:	Fairly strong per GD; Air and Fire combine to offset Air-Earth weakness
Air-Earth-Water	Well-dignified per GD; complementary opposites produce opportunity
Air-Earth-Air:	Ill-dignified