Heraclitus fr. 10: A Musical Interpretation

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Fr. 10 is very obscure, even by Heraclitus' standards. There is no general agreement on the text itself, and very different interpretations of the fragment have been proposed. Is the first word συνάψεις or συνάψεις? What do the succeeding pairs of opposites mean? How does the final phrase (ἐκ τάρτων κ.τ.λ.) fit in with these "opposites"? More generally what is the fragment as a whole about? Formally, fr. 10 most closely resembles those fragments which describe an initial subject in terms of a series of opposed predicates. But the interpretations advanced so far do not treat fr. 10 as analogous to these apparent parallels. Instead, it is suggested

* I am grateful to Mr. E. L. Hussey for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.
1 DK read συνάψεις and this reading is retained in the most recent discussion of fr. 10 (C. J. Emlyn-Jones, 'Heraclitus and the Identity of Opposites', in Phronesis 21, 1976, 89-114). But since Snell's discussion of fr. 10 (Hermes 76, 1941, 84-7) all major editors (Kirk, Marcovich, Kahn) have preferred the reading συνάψεις. The most helpful bibliography on this textual question remains that of Marcovich.
2 Apart from problems of interpretation, Kirk has pointed out that δια and οὐδείς δια are not in fact opposites but 'contraries'. Emlyn-Jones (note 1 above) suggests that the list of opposites are not all predicates of the initial term in the fragment, but that συμφερόμενον and συνάρπαζον should be regarded as separate subjects, each with its own predicate (διαφερόμενον and διάρρηκτον respectively). Marcovich treats the opposites as examples of συνάψεις.
3 Kirk proposes to take ἐκ τάρτων ἐν as parallel to the words δια, συμφερόμενον and συνάρπαζον, and ἐκ ἐνὸς τάρτα as parallel to the words οὐδείς δια, διαφερόμενον and διάρρηκτον. But some commentators do not attempt to link the final phrase in any close manner to the preceding words, preferring to interpret it as making a separate, cosmological, point. Yet others, such as Marcovich, see no correspondence between ἐκ τάρτων ἐν and ἐκ ἐνὸς τάρτα — a most improbable circumstance in view of the obvious correspondence between all the other phrases which follow the initial term.

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that Heraclitus uses the opposed terms of fr. 10 in a manner unique to this fragment.4

I hope to cast some light on this obscurity by looking afresh at the term σύναφες. If we consider σύναφες against the background of its cognate form συναφή a new meaning is suggested which is prima facie relevant to Heraclitus' doctrine of unity (Sections One and Two). This new interpretation of σύναφες does much to remove our uncertainties about fr. 10. The various pairs of opposites will all make sense, while the final phrase takes on a new appropriateness. Taken as a whole the fragment can now be seen to follow a typically Heraclitean pattern of thought about the unity of the opposites (Sections Three and Four).

Section One: The Subject of fr. 10 — συνλάψες or συνάψες?

The MSS are fairly evenly divided between the readings συνλάψες and συνάψες with "reputable" support for both.5 But since the edition of Kirk, virtually all editors, and most commentators, have preferred to read συνλάψες.6 Kirk's preference for this reading is very largely based on the opinion of Snell7 who argues that the Ionic form συνλάψες would make the more familiar form of συνάψες a lectio facillior. Now it is true that συνάψες is always a lectio facillior in Athens where the α-form of συνλάψες would be unfamiliar. But συνάψες is not necessarily always a lectio facillior elsewhere, and our ignorance of when the variants arose in antiquity makes Snell's point less attractive than it initially appears to be. There are also a

4 Thus there is general agreement, despite much divergence on detailed points, that the opposites of fr. 10 belong to a higher logical category than those of the fragments which are comparable in expression. These fragments (e.g. frs. 60 and 61) discuss some concrete subject (a path, or sea-water) to which the opposite predicates ('up and down', 'safe and harmful') refer. But fr. 10's opposites are treated by commentators as 'topic neutral', with a generality of meaning quite unparalleled by the comparable fragments in Heraclitus.

5 Support for both readings can be found in the main groups of the de Mundo MSS which Lorimer has identified. Thus in the group BCDG, BCG all preserve some form of συνάψες. And in the group AEHP, AEH support a form of συνάψες while P has συνλάψες. It is true that a preponderance of the main MSS favour some συναψ — formation. On the other hand, Apuleius's de Mundo seems to follow a συνλάψες tradition (with Apul. B offering συνλαψάς and Apul. V συνλαψάς). It therefore looks as if συναψ — and συνλαψ — are ancient variants. Mr. Hussey suggests that at some, possibly early, date some texts of ps. - Ar. de Mundo were corrected from some other source for Heraclitus.

6 See note 1 above.

7 loc. cit. note 1 above.