In his *Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit* (Berlin 1937, 2nd ed. 1949), Hartmann gives us an ontological theory of the modes. He starts from a distinction between the modes of the various spheres of being, primary and secondary. The two primary spheres of being, according to his ontology, are the real and the ideal. The two secondary spheres are those of logic and knowledge. The modes of the real world are accordingly contrasted with those of the ideal realm; the modes of the realm of logic are again different from those of knowledge. The modal doctrine is thereby divided into four parts. But there must be also a part on the relations between these different spheres.

Traditional discussion of the problem of modality did not see clearly through these distinctions. This gives to Hartmann's treatment of the problem its originality. Further, these modes of the various spheres are distinguished from the naive day to day consciousness of modality.

The ontological point of view requires specification. For this purpose, we are to distinguish between three different approaches to the problem of modality:

First, it is possible to consider the modalities as criteria for classifying all objects in the three groups, those that are merely possible, those that are both possible and actual, and those that are possible, actual and also necessary.

Secondly, it is possible to consider the modes as if they were different stages of a process. Thus, it may be said that a thing

first becomes possible, then is made actual, and further may or
may not be necessary. The process however may not be carried
to the end; what is possible may never be actualised.

Thirdly, the modes may be taken neither as criteria nor as
stages of a process, but as the constituent aspects of the existent
or the subsistent, as the case may be. This is the point of view
which we may call the critical point of view, because we may
trace it to Kant. Kant starts from the given object of experience
and then asks how the same is possible, actual and necessary.

Hartmann rejects the first two approaches. Modes are for him
neither criteria nor stages, but the most primary characteristics
of the being of anything. As such, given an object of experience,
we can ask: what makes it possible? What makes it actual? What
makes it necessary? Thus in an important sense, Hartmann’s
treatment of the problem is similar to Kant’s, even though
Kant’s own solutions are rejected by Hartmann. For Kant,
the given is possible when considered in relation to its form and
actual when considered in relation to its matter. Hartmann
finds this not only inadequate but also misleading: to this how­
ever we shall turn later on.

The second approach is attributed to Aristotle. Both the
first and the second approaches attribute to the merely possible
which is not ‘or has not yet become actual’ a sort of ghostly
existence — a position in between being and non-being. Aristot­
le’s doctrine of dynamis and energia is further criticised as an
illegitimate extension of the categories of the sphere of organic
being to the entire domain of being. Further, if a prior stage of
mere possibility is admitted, the question arises as to what must
be added to it in order to render it actual. Kant had shown that
any answer to this question is absurd. For that which must be
so added, argued Kant, must be other than the possible, that
is to say, must be impossible.¹

As such, we come back to the critical formulation of the question.
This is one of the points where we begin to see the influence of
Kant on Hartmann’s ontology which claims the name of critical
ontology.

¹ I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Kant Werke III, p. 206, ed. by Cassirer.