

RESEARCH STATEMENT
BRENDAN MURDAY

My research centers on modality in metaphysics and philosophy of language. Two-dimensional semantics has been invoked by David Chalmers and Frank Jackson in defense of “modal monism” (the view that there is only one ultimate kind of modality) and a rejection of the necessary a posteriori. I think that the two-dimensionalist approach to modality and semantic content has its merits, but can’t sustain the picture Chalmers and Jackson favor. My dissertation begins the project of developing a new view of modality, but more work remains.

Spelling out my view of modality will take three steps: first, I need to develop a theory of propositions, the bearers of necessity and possibility. I will argue against possible-world analyses of propositions, on the grounds that semantics requires structured propositions. I will defend the existence of Russellian singular propositions (propositions that contain individuals as constituents) against its detractors, while admitting also the existence of general propositions. Of particular concern to me is the treatment of sentential operators – I have devoted two dissertation chapters to the operators ‘Actually’ and ‘According to the fiction’, but I have not addressed other alethic operators (like ‘At possible world α ’), temporal operators (like ‘Occasionally’), or doxastic operators (like ‘S believes that’).

The second part of my project is to explicate the relationship between sentences, propositions, and contexts. The principal application of two-dimensionalism has been Kaplan’s theory of indexicals; I need to investigate the pervasiveness of indexicality and/or contextuality in order to determine the modal content of natural language utterances.

Lastly, I am interested in the metaphysics of modality, specifically the relationships between metaphysical, conceptual, logical, and epistemic possibility. Metaphysicians tend to assume that there is one ultimate kind of modality; for instance, there is a widespread (but rarely defended) supposition that metaphysical possibility is merely a restriction on logical possibility. I will argue that the relations between these types of modality are more complex; for instance, I think there are both conceptually possible metaphysical impossibilities and metaphysically possible conceptual impossibilities.