

# Graeber and Auden: Traps, Lies, and Love

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<http://cforster.com/2011/12/graeber-auden>

During break, I've been enjoying reading David Graeber's *Debt: The First Five Thousand Years*. Graeber's description of the opposing logics of the market and the state recalled to my mind the penultimate stanza of Auden's "September 1, 1939" that I couldn't resist quickly noting it here.

Here is Graeber:

This is the great trap of the twentieth century: on the one side is the logic of the market, where we like to imagine we all start out as individuals who don't owe each other anything. On the other is the logic of the state, where we all begin with a debt we can never truly pay. We are constantly told that they are opposites, and that between them they contain the only real human possibilities. But it's a false dichotomy. States created markets. Markets require states. Neither could continue without the other, at least, in anything like the forms we would recognize today.

These two traps are what Auden will call the romantic lie and the lie of authority; and what Graeber describes as the interdependence of the market and the state is what Auden will call (and famously

regret calling) *love*:

All I have is a voice To undo the folded lie, The romantic  
lie in the brain Of the sensual man-in-the-street And  
the lie of Authority Whose buildings grope the sky:  
There is no such thing as the State And no one exists  
alone; Hunger allows no choice To the citizen or the  
police; We must love one another or die.