Jane English: “What do Grown Children Owe Their Parents?”

What she argues: there are things that children ought to do for their parents, but they do not owe them things. Contrast between the concept of “debt repayment” and duties from friendship.

Favor:
“when A, at B’s request, bears some burden for B, then B incurs an obligation (the “debt”) to reciprocate” (757)

Example: Max, Nina and the mail (757)

Voluntary Sacrifice: Nina mows Max’s lawn unasked.
Difference: no duty to reciprocate
(is that right? Nina will probably feel “miffed” but has she no right to?)
This is a “friendly gesture”.

Way to distinguish between favors and non-favors amongst friends: check motivation.
e.g., Max: “is it to be nice to Nina, or because she did x for me?

Example of strangers giving favors:
Oscar and Matilda and the shopping cart (758)

Difference between the “duties” of friendship and favors:

1. friendship is characterized by mutuality rather than reciprocity: “friends offer what they can give and accept what they need” (758-9) (example, Alfred and Beatrice and the dinner; The Smiths and the Joneses – 759)
   BUT: what if one side does everything – isn’t there something wrong with that?
   Answer: yes, but not because somebody’s rights are violated, but rather because the friendship becomes servile
2. After a friendship ends, the duties of friendship end (example: Elmer, Doris, Elmer’s new wife Cora and the pint of blood – 759-60)

“Unrequested sacrifices (e.g., the lawn-mowing) do not themselves create debts, but friends have duties regardless of whether they requested or initiated the friendship”
Motivations should be different: favors can be motivated by mutual gain, but friends should be motivated by affection.

What does this have to do with parents and children?
Answer: the relationship between them should be one of friendship and not characterized by favors.

That is: the sacrifices a parent makes do not incur debts in the children that they then have to repay as adults.
Why not? Because parents should not be motivated by mutual gain in sacrificing for their children.

"Regardless of the quantity of childhood sacrifices, an able, wealthy child has an obligation to help his needy parents more than does a needy child" (760-1)
(example: Cecile and Dana – 761)

Although sacrifices may help to develop the friendship, they do not incur the debts – example of woman who gives child up for adoption (761) – the child owes her nothing for her burden in childbirth.
Also: Vance and Lola

How parents should talk:
NOT:
“we did x for you, so you must do y for us”
INSTEAD:
“we love you and would be happier if you did y”
OR:
“we believe you love us, and anyone who loved us would do y”

By the same token, children should not say:
“I never asked for ____ (e.g., to be born)”
but instead (perhaps):
“If you really loved me, you would want me to be free to do ____ (get my tongue pierced, forehead tattooed, et. al.)”

BUT:
“Love does not even dictate that the child adopt the parents’ values as to the desirability of alternative life goals.” (762)