

Frames of Reference

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Suzi looks at things very carefully because she is an artist, or maybe she is an artist because she looks at things very carefully. At any rate, Suzi remarked to me from the glass observation pod of her Cayucos beach house that it was *so beautiful to look at the bumpy ocean horizon on a clear day!* I was facing the kitchen at the time and as I turned around to look at Suzi's



horizon I reckoned that from the altitude of the observation pod the horizon was about 10 miles. At that distance the apparent height of 10 foot waves would be on the order of 600 microns at a range of one foot (about 6 seconds of arc), which is less than $\frac{1}{4}$ the smallest scale that human vision can resolve. The profile of the ocean horizon from an altitude of 50 feet is perfectly smooth. Actually I just made these calculations as I write, but by the time I had turned to face the horizon I had already concluded that Suzi could see no such beautiful thing as a bumpy horizon, and I probably said so before I even looked at it. I couldn't see it.

Of course, Suzi was right. If we had been overlooking a water ocean on the moon I would have been right, but then Suzi would not have seen the bumps because they would not have been there. Suzi looks at things very carefully. On Earth, 10 miles of turbulent atmosphere refract the light from the perfectly smooth horizon in a chaotic pattern to yield an ocean horizon that is indeed bumpy. It is *shimmering* actually, if you take a stream of images rather than a snapshot. Now I can see Suzi's beautiful bumpy horizon and I can show her my turbulent atmosphere!

Human relations are always like that. The other humans that you interact with may see the same scene in a completely different way. You can learn from each other without disputing the facts. It depends on your frame of reference. Call me.

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