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Thoughts on Gaetano Fichera

The times after the end of the Second World War saw a huge, international flowering of research in the theory of partial differential equations. Mathematicians in all advanced countries made significant contributions; many of them were young scholars at the beginning of their careers; Gaetano Fichera was one of them.

Fichera's contributions were to problems originating in mathematical physics, then as now one of the most significant source of problems for the field. Since his work is described elsewhere in these pages, I will instead write about his personality.

Gaetano was ambitious, as befits a young man, some times combative, but very kind at times. He was very witty, with a sardonic edge to his humor. I remember the first time he visited the University of Wisconsin; at the airport he saw a big advertisement for Schlitz beer, "THE BEER THAT MADE MILWAUKEE FAMOUS". His comment was "A beer made in Rome could not use such a slogan."

I remember many amusing hours with Gaetano; I miss him, one of the most colorful mathematical personalities of the second half of the twentieth century.

