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C. Fiolhais F. Nogueira M. Marques (Eds.)

A Primer in Density Functional Theory



Springer

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Preface

Density functional theory is a clever way to solve the Schrödinger equation for a many-body system. In the formulation given by Kohn, Hohenberg, and Sham in the 1960's the real system is described by an effective one-body system. To achieve that goal, the complex many-body wave function, which is the solution of the Schrödinger equation, is abandoned in favour of the density which only depends on the three spatial coordinates. The energy is just a function of this function, i.e., a density functional.

This book, which intends to be an introduction to density functional theory, collects the lectures presented in the second Coimbra School on Computational Physics. In a way, it is a sequel to the sold-out Lecture Notes in Physics vol. 500 (ed. D. Joubert). This Summer School took place in late August of 2001 in the nice scenery of the Caramulo mountains, in central Portugal, some 50 km away from the old University of Coimbra. It was organized by the recently established (1998) Center for Computational Physics of the University of Coimbra, and was the second of a series which started, in 1999, with a school on "Monte Carlo Methods in Physics".

Like the summer school in South-Africa which originated the volume 500, the Coimbra School on Computational Physics devoted to density functional methods was a good opportunity for graduate students to enter the realm of density functionals, or to enlarge their previous knowledge in this fast expanding branch of physics and chemistry. About 50 students from different countries attended the School. Some teachers, who were also present at the South-African School (John Perdew, Reiner Dreizler and Eberhard Gross), were joined by new ones (Eberhard Engel, Rex Godby, Fernando Nogueira and Miguel Marques). The school was possible due to the support of Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian and the University of Coimbra, whom we would like to acknowledge here.

The contents of this volume are as follows. The theoretical foundations of the theory are reviewed by Stefan Kurth and John Perdew, in a chapter which is essentially an updated version of the article published in the above mentioned volume 500. The recent orbital dependent functionals are presented by Eberhard Engel. Two important extensions to the standard theory follow: relativistic systems, by Reiner Dreizler; and time-dependent non-relativistic problems by Miguel Marques and Eberhard Gross. In the next chapter Rex

Godby and Pablo García-González discuss some of the shortcomings of density functional theory and contrast it with conventional many-body theory. A tutorial, by Fernando Nogueira, Alberto Castro, and Miguel Marques, on practical applications of the formalism to atoms, molecules, and solids closes this book.

From the school and from this book emerges the view that, even though the “divine functional” – the energy functional with exact exchange and exact correlation – is yet a vision far on the horizon, extraordinary progress has been made since the seminal works of Kohn, Hohenberg, and Sham (not to speak about the early work in the thirties by Thomas and Fermi). The local density approximation to exchange and correlation from the sixties has been surpassed by the now standard generalized-gradient approximations. In principle more precise approaches like the meta-generalized gradient approximation or hybrid functionals are now being developed and applied, climbing what John Perdew called picturesquely “Jacob’s Ladder” towards the “divine functional”. The Chemistry Nobel prize awarded in 1998 to John Pople and Walter Kohn indeed gave a major impulse to the dissemination of density functional theory in physics and chemistry (several applications in biology and geology have also appeared!), but in order to have “chemical accuracy” further steps have to be taken.

It is the task of the new generation to continue the past and present efforts in this exciting field. We hope with this “primer” in density functional theory to provide students, and even established researchers, an overview of the present state and prospects of density functional methods.

Last but not least, the Coimbra school was also an opportunity to recognize the work of an active player in the field – Reiner Dreizler – on the occasion of his retirement, which took place in September 2001. The organizers would like to dedicate the present book to him. Although they know that he is not keen of homages and that his activity in physics is not over, we think that it is fully justified to summarize here his curriculum, emphasizing some of his achievements.

Reiner Dreizler was born 1936 in Stuttgart, Germany. In 1961, he received his “Diploma” in theoretical physics at the Albert Ludwigs Universität, in Freiburg, and in 1964, the title of Doctor of Philosophy in theoretical physics at the Australian National University, Canberra. From 1964 to 1966 he was Research Associate at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA and thereafter, until 1972, Assistant Professor of Physics at the same University. From 1972 to his retirement, he was Full Professor of Theoretical Physics at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität, Frankfurt am Main, Germany. He has been guest lecturer all around the world, namely in Romania, Australia, Portugal, Russia, Ukraine, Japan, the USA and Brazil. Regarding positions and honours: He was Dean in 1981/1982 of the Faculty of Physics, Universität Frankfurt, and became Fellow of the American Physical Society in 1995; In 1999 he received the endowed chair “S. Lyson Professor der Physik”.

His research interests have been very diverse. Besides the development and application of density functional methods, he studied the many-body problem in nuclear, atomic and molecular physics, and the theory of atomic scattering processes. He also investigated variational, iterative and projective techniques in handling quantum-mechanical problems and made contributions to the quantum-field description of many-body systems. Over the years he accumulated more than 230 contributions to refereed journals, 27 conference contributions, and four books. These include two Plenum Press Proceedings volumes, that stemmed from schools on density functional theory (one of them in Alcabideche, Lisbon), and the famous Springer textbook on density functional theory co-authored by his ex-student and friend Eberhard Gross. He was supervisor of many PhDs. (including one of the school organizers and two of the school speakers) and Diploma theses.

In a world where science is more and more specialized, it is more and more difficult to meet someone like Reiner Dreizler, who covered with his work the whole spectrum of quantum mechanics from Particle to Solid State Physics, through Atomic, Molecular and Cluster Physics. May his example be followed by others!

Coimbra,
December 2002

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