Magnetic ground state and Fermi surface of bcc Eu

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Using spin-spiral technique within the full potential linearized augmented-plane-waves (LAPW) electronic structure method, we investigate the magnon spectrum and Néel temperature of bcc Eu. Ground state corresponding to an incommensurate spin spiral is obtained in agreement with experiment and previous calculations. We demonstrate that the magnetic coupling is primarily through the intra-atomic $f\rightarrow s$ and $f\rightarrow d$ exchange and Ruderman-Kittel-Kasuya-Yosida mechanism. We show that the existence of this spin spiral is closely connected to a nesting feature of the Fermi surface, which was not noticed before.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The magnetic behavior of most rare-earth (RE) materials is governed by localized magnetic moments interacting indirectly through the sea of delocalized valence electrons. A typical feature of RE systems is existence of two electron species, localized $4f$'s exhibiting atomiclike behavior with strong Coulomb interaction and delocalized $5d$ and $6s$ electrons with interaction merely renormalizing the band dispersion. Yet, a typically weak interaction between these two species, either due to intra-atomic exchange or band mixing (hybridization), gives rise to a variety of magnetic behaviors. On the model level this behavior is captured by the periodic Anderson model or Kondo lattice model. The ab initio electronic structure methods based on density functional theory have notorious problems in dealing with the strong correlations within the $4f$ shell. In particular, the splitting between occupied and unoccupied $4f$ bands, which is the way a single-particle band structure can capture the effect of Coulomb interaction, is missing. Consequently, the $f$ bands appear at the Fermi level, resulting in unrealistic filling of both $f$ and valence orbitals. Two remedies can be used: (i) open-core treatment or (ii) additional Coulomb term with the simplest example being the LDA+U method. In the open-core treatment the $4f$ orbitals are kept separate from the rest of the valence Hamiltonian, and the interaction with the valence states is only through the self-consistent potential. Obviously, the proper filling of both $f$ and valence bands is easy to achieve if integer, however, all kinematic exchange effects (e.g., superexchange) based on band mixing are missing. In the LDA+U approach, the splitting between the occupied and unoccupied $f$ band is obtained due to an additional orbital-dependent term. All possible exchange processes are, in principle, accounted for in this approach.

Compounds containing Eu in $2+$ formal valency are particularly well suited for LDA+U treatment, because the orbital degrees of freedom are quenched in the half filled $f$ shell. Examples involve ferromagnetic insulators EuO and EuS, semimetallic EuB$_6$ (Ref. 7) and metallic elemental Eu. Presumably the exchange mechanisms in these materials are quite different.

In this paper we investigate the magnetic ground state and magnon spectrum of elemental Eu. Europium crystallizes in body-centered cubic (bcc) structure with a lattice constant of 4.555 Å at 100 K. The magnetic groundstate was found to be a spin spiral and the Néel temperature of 91 K. The electronic structure was previously investigated by Freeman and Dimmock and Andersen and Loucks using the $Xa$ potential. Recently, Turek et al. used a real-space perturbation approach based on tight-binding linear muffin-tin orbital (TB-LMTO) method to calculate the exchange parameters and corresponding magnon spectrum and Néel temperature. Here we use a reciprocal space based spin spiral approach which can be viewed as complementary to the real space calculations. Unlike the above authors who used the open core treatment of the $4f$ orbitals we employ the LDA+U method. We use the linearized augmented-plane-waves (LAPW) method and its extension to non-collinear magnetic structures utilizing the generalized Bloch theorem for calculation of the spin spiral states. We interpret our results in terms of Ruderman-Kittel-Kasuya-Yosida (RKKY) exchange mechanism and the Fermi surface property. For this purpose we evaluate the low frequency limit of the general susceptibility and identify the nesting features of the Fermi surface.

II. COMPUTATIONAL METHOD

We have used the Wien2k implementation of the full potential LAPW method and its extension for noncollinear spin structures. The effective single-particle potential was constructed from the LDA+U functional, with the exchange-correlation potential of Perdew and Wang and the double-counting scheme of Anisimov. The Coulomb term parameterized with U ($7 \text{ eV}$ unless stated otherwise), and J ($0.75 \text{ eV}$) was applied to the $4f$ orbitals. The spin spirals were treated using the generalized Bloch theorem, which prohibits inclusion of the spin-orbit coupling. The atomic
sphere approximation was employed, in which the direction of the exchange field is constrained inside atomic spheres and allowed to vary continuously in the interstitial space.

A spin spiral is defined by a propagation vector \( \mathbf{q} \) and angle \( \theta \) between the local moment and the precession axis. The orientation of the precession axis itself is arbitrary unless the spin-orbit coupling is taken into account. Each spin spiral was calculated self-consistently. This approach has two deficiencies compared to the perturbative approach employing the force theorem:\(^{21}\) (i) it takes much more computational effort, (ii) more importantly, one has to work with total energies instead of the sums of eigenvalues (i.e., looking at small differences of large numbers, which requires high accuracy). As for (i), when performing calculations for \( \mathbf{q} \)-vectors along a certain path in the reciprocal space, converged spin density from a nearby \( \mathbf{q} \) can be used as the starting point, which reduces the number of iteration needs significantly compared to starting from scratch for each \( \mathbf{q} \). As for (ii), \( \theta \) dependence of spin-spiral energies can be studied without being limited to small angles.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### A. Bandstructure

In Fig. 1 we show the spin-projected band structure obtained with U of 7 eV and J of 0.75 eV. The lowest valence band around the \( \Gamma \) point with a predominant \( 6s \) character corresponds to a strongly dispersive \( s \) band. Moving toward the zone boundary mixing with the \( d \) band takes place and the doublets at H and P points have a pure \( d \) symmetry. The states in the vicinity of the Fermi level have mostly \( d \) character.

The occupied \( 4f \) levels are localized about 3 eV below the Fermi level and cross the lowest valence band, with negligible hybridization, which is reflected by completely flat dispersion. The unoccupied \( 4f \) bands are approximately 7 eV above the Fermi level. A bandwidth of about 2 eV originates from mixing with the \( 6p \) and \( 5d \) bands. Lack of mixing with valence states in the occupied \( f \) bands indicates that the kinetic exchange, involving hopping from localized \( f \) orbitals into the delocalized band states, is not important here. The interaction between the localized \( f \) states and the rest of the electronic system is dominated by intra-atomic \( f-s \) and \( f-d \) exchange. Consequently, the spin-polarized bands and density of states below 2 eV exhibit almost a perfect rigid shift. The deviations from this pattern are due to the difference between the \( f-d \) and \( f-s \) intra-atomic exchange.

#### B. Magnon spectrum

The magnetic excitations are discussed in terms of a classical Heisenberg Hamiltonian

\[
H = - \sum_{\mathbf{R}, \mathbf{R}'} J_{\mathbf{R}, \mathbf{R}'} \mathbf{e}_R \cdot \mathbf{e}_{R'}. \tag{1}
\]

A spin spiral characterized by the propagation vector \( \mathbf{q} \) and angle \( \theta \) has the form

\[
\mathbf{e}_R = [\sin(\theta)\cos(\mathbf{q} \cdot \mathbf{R}), \sin(\theta)\sin(\mathbf{q} \cdot \mathbf{R}), \cos(\theta)]. \tag{2}
\]

The corresponding energy per lattice site obtained from (1) is to be compared to the \textit{ab initio} results. \( E_0 \) is the nonmagnetic part of the total energy. Note that only the difference \( J(q)-J(0) \) can be obtained from the knowledge of \( E(q) \). In order to fix the value of \( J(q) \) the sum rule

\[
\int d\mathbf{q} J(q) = 0, \tag{5}
\]

where the integration is over the Brillouin zone, is to be employed. The \( J(q) \) normalized this way contains only information about the intersite \( J_{\mathbf{R}, \mathbf{R}'} \) and can be related to the ordering temperature, which is discussed below.

Using the Hamiltonian (1) involves several approximations. Quenching of the orbital moment in a half filled shell, rigidity of the \( f \) moment and its size \((S=7/2)\) well justify the use of Heisenberg Hamiltonian in classical approximation. In addition we assume that the exchange parameters are constant. This is not \textit{a priori} guaranteed, since the electronic structure of the band electrons, which carry the exchange interaction between the local \( f \) moments, depends on the arrangement of local moments. This question was discussed in detail by Nolting et al.\(^{22}\) who derived an expression for the effective exchange parameters \( J_{\mathbf{R}, \mathbf{R}'} \) in terms of the conduction electron self-energy. Experimentally this leads to temperature dependence of the effective exchange parameters. If this effect were important, then a deviation from the \( \theta \) dependence of Eq. (3) would have been expected. The fact that we have not found any significant deviation from (3) in the range from 90° to 30° serves as a justification of use of Hamiltonian (1). This is also in agreement with a rather big ratio of the bandwidth to the exchange splitting in the conduction band.

In Fig. 2 we show the \( \mathbf{q} \)-dependent exchange parameter obtained with maximum \( \theta \) of 90°. Calculations performed

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with U of 6 eV and 8 eV lead to almost identical dispersion supporting our previous conclusion about the $f$–$d$ exchange mechanism, which does not depend on the position of the $f$ bands. The calculations yield a minimum energy corresponding to a spiral with propagation vector $Q$ of $(0.27\pm0.01) \times (2\pi/a,0,0)$ and another two local minima along $\Gamma N$ and $\Gamma P$ lines. The ground-state spin spiral corresponds to the rotation of the magnetization vector by $(49\pm2)^\circ$, which value corresponds very well to both theoretical and experimental results.

In order to address the Néel temperature, the $E(q)$ throughout the Brillouin zone is needed. To this end we have calculated the spin spirals on a $10\times10\times10$ regular $q$ grid (44 irreducible $q$ points) and used a smooth Fourier interpolation to obtain $J(q)$ on a denser grid. In Fig. 3 we compare the interpolating function to the ab initio results along the high symmetry directions. Since only a few high symmetry $q$-points were contained in the regular grid, the agreement between the interpolating function and the ab initio data points indicates the quality of the grid. Comparison to the results obtained by Turek et al. reveals a very good agreement of the key features. In order to facilitate a detailed comparison of the real space and reciprocal space approaches we present in Fig. 4 the exchange parameters as a function of the interatomic distance (upper panel). The same curve with the $d^5$ prefactor (bottom panel) reveals the RKKY oscillations.

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In this section we discuss the paramagnetic Fermi surface and its connection to the spin-spiral ground state. Very fine k-point sampling is required in order to study the fine details of the Fermi surface. We adopted the following approach. Starting with 100 irreducible k-points obtained with LAPW code we have used the procedure for smooth Fourier interpolation to the bands at the Fermi energy. We have generated the band energies on a finer mesh of approximately $1.5 \times 10^6$ k-points in the whole Brillouin zone, which was used for the calculations reported below. In Fig. 5 we show the paramagnetic band structure together with the Fourier interpolation, which is excellent near $E_F$ (note that the interpolation was performed on different regular mesh).

The paramagnetic Fermi surface of bcc Eu (Fig. 6) consists of an electron pocket centered at H point, and a hole

FIG. 2. The $q$-dependent exchange parameter calculated using the spin-spiral approach. Comparison of the results for different k-point samplings indicates that the $15 \times 15 \times 15$ mesh is reasonably well converged.

FIG. 3. The $q$-dependent exchange parameter renormalized to satisfy the sum rule (5) along the high symmetry lines; ab initio data (symbols), Fourier interpolation (line). The right panel shows the corresponding density of states.

FIG. 4. The exchange parameter as a function of the interatomic distance (upper panel). The same curve with the $d^5$ prefactor (bottom panel) reveals the RKKY oscillations.
pocket located at P point. Symmetry related degeneracy of the valence band along the P-H direction results in touching of these pockets. The first numerical investigation of the Fermi surface of bcc Eu was reported by Andersen and Loucks,\textsuperscript{11} who called these pockets “supereggs” and “tettracube,” respectively. While our calculation reproduces the supereggs shape, contrary to Andersen’s cube with lobes we find rather a rounded tetrahedron with lobes.

In order to make connection between the Fermi surface geometry and calculated spin-spiral dispersion, we have evaluated the imaginary part of the generalized susceptibility

\[ \chi_{ij}(q, \omega) = \pi \omega \sum_k \delta (\epsilon_k(k) - \epsilon_F) \delta (\epsilon_k(k + q) - \epsilon_F) \]  \hspace{1cm} (9)

\[ = \pi \omega n_{ij}(q), \]  \hspace{1cm} (10)

where \( n(q) \) measures so called nesting, i.e., the extent to which different parts of the Fermi surface weighted by the inverse square of the Fermi velocity are parallel. While the real part of the generalized susceptibility is directly related to the exchange parameters \( J(q) \), it is the imaginary part that has a straightforward geometrical interpretation. The real and imaginary parts are bound by the Kramers-Kronig relations, which, for the \( \omega = 0 \) limit, read

\[ \text{Re} \chi(q, \omega = 0) = \frac{1}{\pi} \int_{-\infty}^{+\infty} d\omega' \frac{\text{Im} \chi(q, \omega')}{\omega'}. \]  \hspace{1cm} (11)

Comparing this to (9), one can readily see that a peak in \( n(q) \) provides a significant contribution to a peak in \( \text{Re} \chi(q, \omega = 0) \). In the special case \( q \to 0 \) limit, \( n(q) \) diverges as \( 1/|q| \).

FIG. 7. (Color online) The nesting function in the ΓH2N plane. The lower-left and upper-right corners correspond to the Γ point with the typical \( 1/|q| \) divergence; the remaining corners are at the H point, and the N point is in the center of the square. The upper panel shows the sum over all (2) bands. The middle panel shows the “supereggs” contribution and the lower panel the lobed tetrahedron contribution (the contribution of the supereggs-to-lobed tetrahedron processes is not shown).
however, the limit $\lim_{q \to 0} \lim_{\omega \to 0} \text{Re} \chi(q, \omega)$ remains finite, equal to the density of states (or corresponding partial density of states) at the Fermi level $N(\varepsilon_f)$. In general, peaks in $\nu(q)$ indicate a tendency toward instability of the Fermi surface toward formation of incommensurate structures, such as spin- or charge-density waves.

Andersen and Loucks concluded that the origin of the spin-spiral ground state is the nesting between the opposite faces of their “tetracube.” However, our investigation provides a different picture. In Fig. 7 we show the nesting function $\nu(q)$ in the $\Gamma H N H$ plane. There is a prominent peak on the $\Gamma - H$ line and a weaker feature on the $\Gamma - N$ line. In order to identify the origin of these features, we have calculated, separately, the contributions of the different sheets of the Fermi surface. Figure 7 demonstrates that both peaks originate from transitions between the lobed tetrahedra surfaces. The $q$ parallel to the $\Gamma - H$ direction amounts to moving the lobed tetrahedron centered at the $P$ point toward the next $P$ point on the same face. The peak on the $\Gamma - H$ line corresponds to the overlap of the lobes, which is illustrated explicitly in Fig. 8. The peak on the $\Gamma - N$ line corresponds to the sum of two nesting vectors along adjacent $\Gamma - H$ directions. Therefore, it originates from an overlap of the tips of the lobes, however, belonging to tetrahedra centered at $P$ points, which are not on the same face. In Fig. 9 we show the nesting function in the $\Gamma H P N$ plane. Besides the peaks on $\Gamma - H$ and $\Gamma - N$ lines, we find weaker features on the $\Gamma - P$ line. Analysis of the contributions from different sheets shows that these features originate from transitions between the two types of Fermi surfaces.

Eventually we can compare the information obtained from the nesting function to the magnon dispersion. We have found a prominent nesting feature on the $\Gamma - H$ line and weaker one on the $\Gamma - N$ line. These are related to the minima in the spin-spiral energies. The energy minima do not sit exactly at the positions of corresponding the nesting vectors. While the nesting vectors contain information about the states directly at the Fermi energy, all states contribute to the spin-spiral minima, yet with a weight decreasing with the distance from the Fermi level. A discussion of the generalized susceptibility in the context of electron-phonon coupling can be found in Ref. 26. The features on the $\Gamma - P$ line are rather weak and do not fit well with the position of the $\Gamma - P$ peak; therefore, we do not draw any conclusion about its direct relation to the local energy minimum on the $\Gamma - P$ line.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Using a full-potential method with the LDA+U functional and spin-spiral approach, we have obtained a magnon spectrum that is in good agreement with that of Turek et al.\textsuperscript{12} using TB-LMTO. The calculations reproduce well the experimentally observed spin-spiral ground state and provide a reasonable estimate of the Néel temperature. The good agreement of two rather different computational methods indicates a robustness of these physical properties. Moreover, we have shown that the values of the exchange parameters are insensitive to the precession angle of the spin spiral as well as the value of $U$, i.e., exact position of the occupied $f$ bands. This confirms the picture of bcc Eu as a Kondo-lattice system with ferromagnetic exchange of intra-atomic origin in the RKKY regime. We have identified the origin of the spin-spiral ground state in terms of nesting properties of the Fermi surface. In particular we have shown that the nesting is connected to the lobed tetrahedron hole pockets centered at the $P$ point of the Brillouin zone.

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7 The question whether steciometric EuB₆ is actually semimetal or semiconductor is still controversial.


