

Buchbesprechung:

David C Clary, *Schrödinger in Oxford*, World Scientific, 2022, English, 403 pages

As the book's title suggests, this work is about the famous physicist's Erwin Schrödinger affiliation with Oxford University from November 1933 until September of 1936. However, the author takes his seemingly narrow subject as an occasion for a fascinating tour of much broader scope. He expands his theme giving us hitherto widely unknown details - not only on Schrödinger's life, his science, and his now and then troublesome interaction with colleagues and friends; yet most importantly the author evokes vividly the general economic, social, and the political atmosphere of Schrödinger's life time. The author relates much more than the personal story of a science genius, once called "little mad genius" by his friend Max Born.

From the book one learns how it came about that Schrödinger, only a few months after Hitler's empowerment and without being forced to do so, gave up his very well paid and highly prestigious post as the successor to Max Planck at Berlin University, and accepted an offer from Magdalen's College to move to Oxford as a fellow. Already by Easter 1933 the far-sighted Oxford physics professor Frederick Lindeman had toured with chauffeur in his Rolls Royce through Germany to recruit dismissed or at least bullied German top rank physicists and chemists for his university. And he proved very successful in this. One immediate result was when Schrödinger, on his very first day as a fellow of Oxford's Magdalen, was awarded with half of the Physics Nobel Prize for 1933. However, Lindemann's tour also paid off for Britain in the long run for many more reasons.

Unfortunately, despite his enormous and immediate fame, Schrödinger did not feel comfortable with Oxford's scientific environment. For several reasons he kept trying to improve his position. And - in a move which with hindsight seems now quite foolish - Schrödinger expected to be better off by moving back to his homeland Austria on a combined ticket of the universities of Graz and Vienna. Austria was ruled then by a rightwing would-be fascist government, which had tried to remain independent from Germany, yet very much like the German Nazi rulers, they suppressed parliamentary pluralism and more than ever opposition of any kind. Only about 18 months after Schrödinger's move to Graz, in March 1938, Austria was swallowed by Hitler's German Reich which then continued to run amok for seven more years. Immediately after Austria's "Anschluss" Schrödinger was put under pressure to sign a declaration of being fully in line with the new government. This move earned Schrödinger contempt and hostility from many of his refugee colleagues. Yet it opened the escape hatch for Schrödinger. Leaving almost all his belongings behind he fled with his wife, with his mistress, and with the daughter he had with his mistress via Italy, Switzerland, France, Belgium and England to Ireland. There all four of them got shelter far off the war's terror till its end. Schrödinger stayed at the newly created Institute of Advanced Studies in Dublin before finally in March 1956 he returned to Austria where he spent his last five years, though sick, yet very much adored.

The author explains, supported by rich documentary evidence, what life was like for many European scientists during the tumultuous and tragic times of the first half of the twentieth century and how these bright folks viewed such dramatic political events at a time when their consequences were not yet determined and their meaning was still blurred by disinformation.

The author impressively relays how Britain enabled so many continental scientists who had fallen prey to despotism and racism not only to survive but even to continue with their work – often with the new goal of winning the war against Germany.

For any further edition of this wonderful volume, it would be desirable to have the many German documents added in their original, untranslated form, since not only the nuances of Schrödinger's finely tuned, deliberate words on occasion escape translation. German speaking readers would benefit extensively from this.

Gebhard Gröbl, April 2022