

## Abstract

Utilizing the recently digitized newspaper articles from *The Old News Archive* [1], this study investigates why the Nebular Hypothesis - as presented in Robert Chambers' *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* - precipitated such intense public controversy. We argue that the central conflict concerned the "piety" of the work in two distinct dimensions. While the Reformist *Examiner* defended the piety of God's acting through natural laws intelligible by human beings, Liberal *Atlas* identified significant theological friction. Conversely, the Catholic *Dublin Evening Post* and Anglican *Edinburgh Evening Post* engaged with the mechanistic origin of morality, asserting that Chambers' framework undermined human dignity and free will, ultimately denouncing the work as atheistic. Consequently, while the Nebular Hypothesis had been popularized without major public outrage by John Pringle Nichol six years prior [2], it was Chambers' synthesis of cosmic and biological evolution that ignited a massive public debate and spurred a substantial scientific research initiative in rural Ireland.

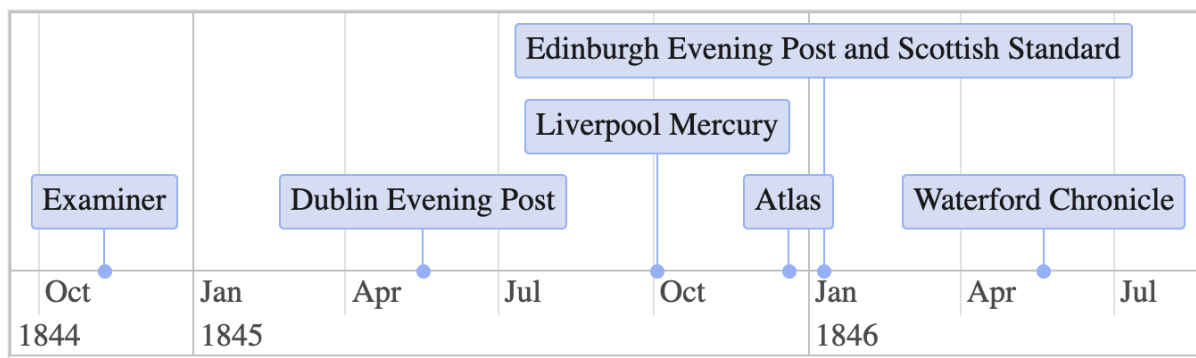


Figure 1: Timeline of the articles we are discussing

## Introduction

### Body

#### The Examiner

The first review of the *Vestiges*, an effusive eulogy, appeared shortly after its publication in the London-based *Examiner*, a "leading intellectual journal expounding radical principles" [3]. It was read by an educated, well-to-do urban intellectual elite capable of paying the relatively steep 6d per issue. The religious persuasions of the readers ranged from the unorthodox liberal Christianity of Alfred Lord Tennyson and Charles Dickens but also the nonbelief of John Stuart Mill [4], [5]. The *Examiner's* positive review contributed to *Vestiges* selling out the first edition in a few days [6].

#### Dublin Evening Post

The *Dublin Evening Post* was one of the most influential newspapers in Dublin [7]. As a Catholic daily, it devoted substantial sections on battling Protestantism, atheism, "phreno-mesmerism" and "materialism", labels which were used fairly liberally and interchangeably. It also explicitly recognized its own biases, recognizing respectfully that sometimes, what *philosophers* might think of as defensible opinions the *Post* viewed with 'deep odium'.

On the 13th of May the *Post* had noted the striking similarities between Chapter 1 of the *Vestiges* [8] and Part III of John Pringle Nichol's *Architecture of the Heavens* [9], and had accused Nichol of atheism and materialism on the presumption that he was the author. Nichol responded on the 15th

of May 1845, noting the “grave charges” against the work in question. Nichol’s recognition that this book was a cultural hot potato is clear by his desire to “not have laid upon me the task of dealing with [these charges]”. We may glean that he potentially sympathized with the arguments in *Vestiges* by his desire to “avoid[...] any expression of opinion as to the justice or injustice of these charges”.

## Conclusion

## Bibliography

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- [8] R. Chambers, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*. 1844.
- [9] J. P. Nichol, *The Architecture of the Heavens*. 1838.