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Talleyrand: the old fraud

by [Andrew Roberts](#)

On Robin Harris's *Talleyrand: Betrayal and Saviour of France*.

Charles-Maurice, Prince de Talleyrand-Périgord, has been very well served by biographers. Alfred Duff Cooper's 1932 life of the long-serving French politician and diplomat is an ornament of English letters, and since then four other impressive works have been written on the same subject. Like his distinguished predecessors, Robin Harris admires his subject and has no hesitation in hailing Talleyrand as a progressive statesman.^[1] Fortunately, however, he also gives the reader plenty of evidence to support a radically different view, that Talleyrand was in fact one of the most revolting human beings to have besmirched the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Written with immense scholarship, captivating wit, and a natural feel for European politics in the turbulent half-century between Louis XV and Louis-Philippe, Harris has subtitled h ...

Andrew Roberts is the author of *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples since 1900* (Harper Collins).

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