To include Bourdieu’s theory in a book on ideology-theories seems as paradoxical as including Foucault. After having used the concept of ideology in his earlier works, he finally dropped it in the 1990s. He justified this with the example, among others, of Althusser, whom he criticised for using the concept of ideology like a religious term, which helped him to discredit the empirical work of ‘so-called social scientists’ for being ‘ideological’, and thus to distance himself from the world in an ‘aristocratic’ way. ‘Indeed, one of the reasons why I don’t like the word “ideology” is because of the aristocratic thinking of Althusser’, he argued in an interview with Terry Eagleton.\(^1\) Besides this, his argument is that the ‘social world doesn’t work in terms of consciousness’, but rather ‘in terms of practices, mechanisms, and so forth’.\(^2\) Another frontline is Bourdieu’s criticism of a theoretical ‘anti-humanism’, which reduces the subjects to mere effects of social structures and ideological apparatuses.\(^3\)

Bourdieu’s arguments need to be disentangled. His view that socialisation does not work primarily on the level of consciousness, but rather of practices, has clearly been formulated by Althusser himself. Instead of supporting the abandonment of the concept of ideology, the argument belongs to the very commonplaces of Marxist ideology-theories. Obviously,

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\(^1\) Bourdieu and Eagleton 1994, p. 267.
\(^2\) Bourdieu and Eagleton 1994, p. 268.
\(^3\) Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, pp. 19, 102.
Bourdieu tries to revive a dead horse so that he can flog it. Bourdieu’s criticism of Althusser’s ‘anti-humanist’ reductionism coincides, however, with my own critique, and thus encourages me to explore whether his claim of developing a non-reductionist notion of the subject can be used to further develop a critical ideology-theory.

To consider Bourdieu’s approach as relevant to ideology-theory (independent of his own opinion on the matter) is further justified by the observation that Bourdieu’s empirical investigations on social ‘fields’ can hardly be interpreted as anything but a wide range of substantial and well-founded exercises in ideology-critique. Already on its first page, his monumental study Distinction announces its intention to formulate a socio-analytical critique of the ‘ideology of charisma’, which regards taste in legitimate culture as a ‘gift of nature’. The Homo Academicus lays bare the ideological mechanisms of the academic field, together with deeply engrained self-deceptions of intellectuals who are more interested in the accumulation of ‘academic’ and ‘intellectual capital’ than in understanding reality intellectually. In his book on State Nobility, Bourdieu scrutinises the internal structure of the dominant class together with the ideological mechanisms of consecration and naturalisation that mask and help reproduce its domination. In the Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger, he deconstructs the strategies of an ideological ‘imposition of form’, by which Heidegger ‘converts’ his politics into ontology and thereby provides his political interventions with the aura of a philosophical authority seemingly independent from social conflicts. The Weight of the World in turn deals, amongst other things, with the destructive dynamics by which neoliberalism’s appeals to creative initiative and empowerment engender an extremely destructive ‘destiny effect’ amongst marginalised youngsters and contingent labourers.

First, I would like to focus on how Bourdieu develops his concept of ‘field’ from the theoretical elements of the German Ideology – ironically from a text which, in the view of many Marxist ideology-theorists, represented nothing more than an outdated paradigm of critique of ‘false consciousness’.

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4. This is a general pattern in Bourdieu’s dismissive remarks on ‘Marxism’ in general, such as when he describes it as ‘a sort of Cartesian philosophy, in which you have a conscious agent who is the scholar, the learned person, and the others who don’t have access to consciousness’ (Bourdieu and Eagleton 1994, p. 268). To argue that the ‘whole Marxist tradition’ is trapped in a fixation with consciousness (Bourdieu 2000a, p. 172), is as counterfactual as his assumption that in regards to symbolic power, ‘Marxist thought is more of a hindrance than a help’ (Bourdieu 2000a, p. 177).