Would-be

1907 | Pragmatism | EP 2:402; CP 5.467

...no agglomeration of actual happenings can ever completely fill up the meaning of a “would-be.”

1910 | Note (Notes on Art. III) [R] | CP 2.667

...though I am not perfectly sure of my ground (and I am a cautious reasoner), yet I am more that what you would understand by “pretty confident,” that supposing one to be in a condition to assert what would surely be the behavior, in any single determinate respect, of any subject throughout an endless series of occasions of a stated kind, he ipso facto knows a “would-be,” or habit, of that subject. It is very true, mind you, that no collection whatever of single acts, though it were ever so many grades greater than a simple endless series, can constitute a would-be, nor can the knowledge of single acts, whatever their multitude, tell us for sure of a would-be. But there are two remarks to be made; first, that in the case under consideration a person is supposed to be in a condition to assert what surely would be the behavior of the subject throughout the endless series of occasions – a knowledge which cannot have been derived from reasoning from its behavior on the single occasions; and second, that that which in our case renders it true, as stated, that the person supposed “ipso facto knows a would-be of that subject,” is not the occurrence of the single acts, but the fact that the person supposed “was in condition to assert what would surely be the behavior of the subject throughout an endless series of occasions.”

Meantime it may be remarked that, though an endless series of acts is not a habit, nor a would-be, it does present the first of an endless series of steps toward the full nature of a would-be.

1913 | A Study of How to Reason Safely and Efficiently | MS [R] 681:22

...by a Habit I shall mean a character of anything, say of B, this character consisting in the fact that under circumstances of a certain kind, say A, B would tend to be such as is signified by a determinate predicate, say C. The same thing might be more briefly expressed by saying that I call any real “Would-be” a habit of the subject of such predication, but by stating the matter more fully I bring into prominence the fact that a “Would-be” is a relation between three objects, A, B, and C.


...a “would-be” refers to a whole range, or general description, of possibilities which it asserts to be alike in a certain respect; so that two directly opposite assertions of would-be’s might both be false, just as two directly opposite states of things might-be true.