While most rhetoricians gave the Aristotelian triad in its traditional form, it sometimes appeared in slightly different configurations. The three genres can be presented as subsets of more comprehensive divisions. This is the case when two different systems of division of rhetorical material are combined: when the system of division into θέσεις and υποθέσεις, deriving from Hermagoras, is matched with Aristotle’s classification of the deliberative, judicial, and epideictic genres, the latter become subsets of the υποθέσεις. If the three genres are considered in the light of specific criteria such as practical efficacy, the tripartition is itself divided in two, with on one hand the ἀγωνιστικοί or πραγματικοί speeches—terms which bracket together deliberative and judicial speeches—and on the other the ἐπιδεικτικοί.

On the other hand, some theoreticians dissented from the standard position, holding that the three genres did not do justice to the diversity of the forms of oratory and attempting to complete the list by adding additional genres. Sometimes the tripartition was extended to include a fourth genre; at other times the genres were multiplied considerably. In spite of these attempts, which were nonetheless sporadic and isolated, in the standard doctrine a renovated system emerged in which the Aristotelian classes were subject to internal subdivisions, giving three genres—deliberative, judicial, and epideictic—and numerous different species deriving from them. And it was in this inclusive and hierarchical system that new forms of speech which developed in the practice of oratory were codified.

17.1 The Three Genres as Subsets of More Comprehensive Divisions

17.1.1 Genres and υποθέσεις

Among the central questions that ancient theoreticians of rhetoric treated there was the definition of the object of the discipline (materia artis).
Cicero and Quintilian both devoted considerable attention to this topic, reviewing the opinions of their predecessors.  

The most radical position, traced back to Gorgias, consisted in the belief that the orator was called on to speak on any subject whatsoever: Gorgias, Cicero affirms, “held that the orator could speak better than anyone else on all subjects” (*omnibus de rebus oratorem optime posse dicere existimavit*). A second position, promoted by Hermagoras, identified the “political questions” (Gr. πολιτικά ζητήματα, cf. Lat. *quaestiones civiles*) as the subject of rhetoric, broken down into “theses” (Gr. θέσεις, cf. Lat. *quaestio infinita* or *propositum*), i.e. speeches on an abstract, general topic, without any reference to specific people, and “hypotheses” (Gr. ὑποθέσεις cf. Lat. *quaestio finita*, *causa*), i.e. speeches on a concrete topic referring to specific people. A third position had been envisaged by Aristotle, who—once again in the words of Cicero—“thought that the function of the orator was concerned with three genres of subjects, the demonstrative, the deliberative, and the judicial” (*tribus in generibus rerum versari rhetoris officium putavit, demonstrativo, deliberativo, iudicali*).

The importance of this question went well beyond arid technical debate: advancing a claim for a more or less comprehensive scope for rhetoric had precise implications in the definition of its relations with the other sciences and *artes* and its role in society and education. In particular, integrating the θέσεις with rhetoric meant in practice extending the domain of rhetoric to philosophy: this gave rise to a *querelle* between rhetoricians and philosophers, and indeed among rhetoricians.

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3 Cic. *Inv.* 1.7 (T. 116) and Quint. *Inst.* 2.21 ff.  
4 *Inv.* 1.7 (T. 116) and Quint. *Inst.* 2.21.21. Quintilian seems to argues for this position, cf. *Inst.* 2.21.4 (T. 152).  
5 “Political questions” (πολιτικά ζητήματα) are those which involve the citizen (πολίτης) and therefore concern political and ethical problems; cf. Calboli Montefusco (1986) 34 n. 16.  
6 *Inv.* 1.8 (T. 116) and Quint. *Inst.* 2.21 (T. 153). The reconstruction of Hermagoras’ scheme is based on the quotations found in ancient sources: the standard work is Matthes (1982). Recently a new edition of Hermagoras’ fragments has been edited by Woerther (2012).  
7 *Inv.* 1.7 (T. 116).  
8 On this controversy see especially Riposati (1947) 165 ff.; Michel (1960) 201–219; Calboli (1965) 18 ff.; Calboli Montefusco (1986) 42 ff. An intermediate solution consisted in distinguishing two types of theses: practical theses relative to action, which could be for orators, and theoretical, purely speculative theses which remained in the province of philosophers. Thus Cicero speaks of *genus actionis* and *genus cognitionis*, see *de Orat.* 3.109–119; *Part.* 62–67 and *Top.* 81–86; cf. Quint. *Inst.* 3.5.6. The distinction is accepted by the writers of *Progymnasmata*: Theon *Prog.* 83.7 ff.; Hermog. *Prog.* 24.1–7; Aphth. 152.1 ff.; Nicol. *Prog.* 76.18 ff.