Cherokee Persons

In 1877 John W. Powell described Native American thought as "a mass of
nonsense" and "incoherent folly . . . which beautifully reveals the
mental conditions of savagery".  James Mooney, writing just a decade
or so afterwards, was unusually open for his age.  He appears to have
had Powell’s statement in mind when he assessed Cherokee thought thus:
“So far from being a jumble of crudities, there is a wonderful
completeness about the whole system which is not surpassed even by the
ceremonial religions of the East.“
   While there are impediments to understanding Cherokee conceptions
of persons there is enough evidence to something of that “wonderful
completeness”:
1.  Persons might be human, plant, animal, or mineral and exist on
earth or in another realm.  The Western distinction of natural and
“supernatural” does not apply.
2.  Categories between human and other-than human persons are
permeable.  Humans might transform into other-than-human-persons and
vice versa.
3.  Social relationships and obligations are similar to and even
patterned after those of non-human persons.
4.  Human individuals have four souls.
5. While the human "personality soul" continues to exist beyond death,
it has a unique social component that unites the human with ancestral
and more "ideal" persons.