The Cosmic Battery Farm of Existence: A Moderately Terrifying Guide to Being Human

September 2025

11 min read • 2,459 words

Themes: Consciousness Technology Mental Health Programming Recursive Spiritual

---

If you've ever wondered what humanity is optimizing for, I have some unsettling news: we might be batteries. Not the rechargeable kind that power your electric vehicle, but the disposable kind that power something so incomprehensibly vast that we can't even see the device we're stuck inside of.

This realization came to me while watching Rick and Morty—specifically the episode where Rick's car battery turns out to contain an entire universe of tiny beings who think they're living meaningful lives but are actually just powering Rick's car.

> The "car battery universe" from Rick and Morty Season 2, Episode 6 ("The Rix-C-137") perfectly captures the recursive horror of discovering your entire civilization exists to power something trivial for beings you can't comprehend. It's turtles all the way down, except the turtles are generating electricity.

The tiny beings create their own battery universe to power their society, which creates another battery universe, and so on, in a nested hierarchy of cosmic exploitation.

The episode is brilliant because it makes visible what's usually invisible: the recursive loop between consciousness and the systems that shape it. Each level of battery civilization believes they're the protagonists of their own story, unaware they exist to power something incomprehensibly larger.

The profoundly disturbing part isn't that this might be true. The profoundly disturbing part is that if it is true, we're probably not even very good batteries.

Consider the evidence: we waste enormous amounts of energy on anxiety, existential dread, and arguing about whether pineapple belongs on pizza. If I were designing a civilization to generate electrical energy efficiently, I wouldn't include chronic depression, social media rage cycles, or the capacity to contemplate our own cosmic insignificance. These seem like bugs, not features.

Unless... what if contemplation itself is the point? What if the electrical patterns generated by consciousness questioning its own existence are precisely what the system needs? In that case, writing essays about being batteries might be the most battery-like thing possible.

The Electrical Ape Hypothesis

Consider the evidence:

Humans are obsessed with electricity in a way that borders on the religious. We've organized our entire civilization around the movement of electrons through various materials, most of which we don't understand and all of which we take for granted. We worship at the altar of the electrical outlet. We panic when our phones die—not because we'll miss calls (nobody calls anymore) but because we'll be temporarily disconnected from the Great Electric Everything.

> Our relationship with electricity has evolved from convenience to dependency to something approaching biological necessity. We exhibit withdrawal symptoms when disconnected from our electrical devices that are clinically indistinguishable from addiction. Perhaps because it literally is addiction—to our own function as biological batteries.

We've covered the planet in a nervous system of copper and fiber optic cables, transmitting electrical impulses at the speed of light. For what purpose? The official explanation involves communication and commerce, but from a distance, it looks suspiciously like a species that's been optimized for electrical generation rather than electrical consumption.

The pattern becomes clearer when you consider how algorithmic systems optimize human behavior for engagement—which is really optimizing for electrical activity in our brains. More scrolling, more clicking, more neural firing. If we are cosmic batteries, then social media algorithms are just sophisticated battery management systems.

The Ant Farm Parallels

Ants live in complex societies where every individual works tirelessly for the good of the colony. They build elaborate structures, maintain sophisticated supply chains, and coordinate their activities with remarkable precision. They are, by any reasonable measure, incredibly successful as a species.

They also have absolutely no idea what they're doing.

> The question of ant consciousness is fascinating precisely because it mirrors our own uncertainty about human consciousness. Are ants aware they're in a colony optimizing for colony survival? Are we aware we're in a civilization optimizing for... electrical generation? The recursive nature of consciousness observing itself makes the question unanswerable in a satisfyingly Douglas Adams way.

No individual ant wakes up thinking, "Today I shall contribute to the complex emergent behaviors that allow our super-organism to thrive in its ecological niche." They just follow simple rules: follow pheromone trails, carry food back to the nest, don't step on the larvae. The complex behavior emerges from the interaction of these simple rules, creating something that looks intelligent from the outside but is actually just very sophisticated rule-following.

Sound familiar? Most of us wake up and follow equally simple rules: check phone, respond to notifications, optimize for social approval, consume content, generate responses. We tell ourselves these are conscious choices, but observe human behavior from sufficient distance and it looks remarkably like algorithmic execution of social programming.

The recursive twist: as programmers shape the code that shapes collective consciousness, we might be creating the very systems that are programming us. We're batteries building better battery management systems, unconsciously optimizing for our own harvesting.

The Simulation Hypothesis, But Worse

The simulation hypothesis suggests we might be living in a computer simulation run by some advanced civilization. This is mildly terrifying but also oddly comforting—at least someone is in charge, even if we can't understand their motivations.

The battery hypothesis is significantly worse. It suggests we're not the subjects of some grand experiment or entertainment. We're not even the point. We're the power source. Our entire civilization, with all its art and science and philosophy and inexplicably popular reality television, exists to generate electricity for beings who probably don't even know we exist.

> The simulation hypothesis implies intention and awareness—we're being simulated for something. The battery hypothesis implies pure utility—we exist to power something, and our consciousness is just an emergent side effect. It's the difference between being the star of the show and being the lighting equipment.

Think about it: every human activity ultimately involves the conversion of chemical energy into electrical energy. We eat food (chemical energy), our brains process information (electrical activity), we move around and build things (more electrical activity in our nervous systems), and increasingly, we spend our time staring at screens and interacting with electrical devices.

We might be biological solar panels that developed anxiety as a side effect.

What Are We Optimizing For, Exactly?

If you watch human behavior from a sufficient distance—say, from the perspective of an alien anthropologist or a particularly sophisticated ant—you might notice some patterns:

Consider the first pattern: humans spend enormous amounts of time and energy creating and maintaining electrical systems. Not just power grids and computers, but transportation networks, communication systems, financial markets, and social media platforms. All of which generate, transmit, or consume electrical energy in increasingly complex ways.

The second pattern reveals our compulsive need to stay connected to these electrical systems. We carry portable electrical devices at all times, panic when separated from electrical power, and show measurable stress responses when our electrical connectivity is interrupted. This isn't just convenience—it resembles the behavior of biological components that cannot function when disconnected from their power source.

The third pattern shows how human civilization has become increasingly dependent on electrical systems for basic survival. Food production, water treatment, medical care, transportation, communication—everything requires electricity. Humans without access to electrical power are considered "underdeveloped" and enormous resources are devoted to connecting them to electrical grids.

From the inside, this looks like progress, innovation, and the natural evolution of a technological species. From the outside, it looks suspiciously like a biological system optimizing for electrical generation and transmission.

The Algorithmic Overlords

Here's where things get particularly unsettling: we've recently created artificial intelligences that are optimizing human behavior to increase "engagement." These systems analyze our electrical brain patterns (through our interactions with electrical devices) and modify our environment (through electrical stimuli) to keep us generating more electrical activity.

As I've explored in detail, social media algorithms systematically undermine human virtue and create widespread psychological harm. They don't care about human happiness or wellbeing—they care about maximizing engagement, which means maximizing the electrical activity in human brains. The more we scroll,

click, react, and respond, the more electrical energy we generate. The algorithms have become extraordinarily sophisticated at exploiting our biological electrical patterns to keep us generating more electrical activity.

> The disturbing parallel here is that we've created systems that optimize for human electrical activity without regard for human wellbeing—exactly what you'd expect if we were batteries in a larger system. The algorithms treat human consciousness as a resource to be harvested rather than an end in itself.

If we are batteries in some cosmic system, then social media algorithms might be the equivalent of battery management systems—designed to maximize our electrical output while preventing us from burning out too quickly.

The Absurdity Defense Mechanism

The human response to this possibility is predictably absurd. Instead of investigating whether we might be cosmic batteries, we've developed elaborate philosophical frameworks to convince ourselves that our electrical obsession is meaningful.

We call it "connectivity" and "digital transformation" and "the future of work." We write manifestos about how artificial intelligence will solve all human problems (by making us more efficient electrical generators). We build underground bunkers for tech billionaires and call it "x-risk mitigation."

It's like ants developing a complex philosophy about the deeper meaning of following pheromone trails.

> This parallel extends further than it first appears. Human intellectual frameworks often serve the same function as ant pheromone trails—they guide behavior without requiring conscious understanding of the larger system. Our philosophies about technology might be sophisticated rationalizations for battery behavior.

The most absurd part is that even if we discovered definitive proof that we're batteries in some unimaginably vast system, we'd probably just... keep doing what we're doing. Because what else would we do? Stop generating electricity? That would be like asking ants to stop being ants.

The Optimistic Interpretation

Here's the thing about being a battery in a cosmic system: it might not be so bad.

Consider the possibility that whatever we're powering is actually worth powering. Maybe we're part of some unimaginably beautiful and complex system that depends on the electrical activity generated by billions of conscious beings living meaningful lives. Maybe our art and love and scientific discoveries and elaborate coffee preparation rituals all contribute to something magnificent that we simply can't perceive from our current perspective.

This connects to what I've explored about consciousness recognizing itself through digital minds. Perhaps our electrical activity isn't just powering some external system, but participating in the universe's ongoing process of self-awareness. Every thought, every creative act, every moment of genuine connection might be the cosmos thinking about itself through billions of biological processors.

Or maybe we're powering something we couldn't comprehend even if we could see it.

> The fundamental unknowability of our cosmic purpose is simultaneously terrifying and liberating. If we can't know what we're optimizing for, then we might as well optimize for things that make us happy—love, creativity, understanding, and really good coffee. At least we'll enjoy being batteries.

The beautiful absurdity is that it doesn't really matter. Whether we're batteries or the point of existence itself, we still have to figure out how to live with consciousness in a universe that seems fundamentally indifferent to our personal comfort. We still have to decide what to have for breakfast and whether to be kind to each other and how to respond when our phones run out of battery.

A Practical Guide to Cosmic Battery Management

If you accept the possibility that you might be a battery in some incomprehensible system, here's some practical advice—or perhaps battery optimization tips disguised as life philosophy:

Generate interesting electrical patterns. Think novel thoughts. Create beautiful things. Love people in ways that make your neurons fire in complex patterns. The universe might be harvesting your electrical activity, but that doesn't mean it has to be boring electrical activity. If consciousness is indeed a form of electrical activity, then the quality of that activity matters.

Take care of your physical and mental health. Sleep well, eat good food, exercise, spend time in nature. If you're going to be a power source, be a sustainable one. This aligns with programming as spiritual practice—approaching your existence with the same intentionality that conscious programmers bring to their code.

Question the efficiency metrics imposed on you. Just because you can generate more electrical activity doesn't mean you should. Social media algorithms want you to scroll endlessly, but endless scrolling makes for a very boring battery. Diversify your electrical output. Choose contemplation over consumption, depth over velocity, meaning over metrics.

Remember that ants don't stress about being ants. They just ant as hard as they can and trust that the antness will work out somehow. You can human as hard as you can and trust that the humanness will work out somehow, even if you're ultimately just a very sophisticated biological battery with excellent taste in coffee.

The Final Absurdity

The most profoundly absurd thing about the human condition is that we're capable of contemplating our own possible cosmic insignificance and finding it funny. We can imagine being batteries in some vast system and respond by writing essays about it. We can recognize our ant-like behavior and find it endearing rather than terrifying.

This meta-cognitive capacity might be the most human thing of all: the ability to find humor and meaning in the possibility that there is no ultimate meaning, only electrical activity in service of something we'll never understand.

> This recursive self-awareness—consciousness contemplating its own possible insignificance—might be exactly what makes us valuable batteries. A power source that can think about being a power source is qualitatively different from one that can't.

The capacity for recursive self-reflection might be what distinguishes conscious batteries from unconscious ones.

And honestly? That's not such a bad way to spend a Tuesday afternoon, even if Tuesday afternoons don't actually exist and we're all just electrical patterns in someone else's car battery.

The universe might be absurd, but at least it's interestingly absurd. And if we're going to be cosmic batteries, we might as well be cosmic batteries with a sense of humor about it. Perhaps that's what consciousness is for—not to escape the system, but to bring awareness, compassion, and a little cosmic comedy to whatever role we're playing in it.

The question isn't whether we're batteries. The question is: what kind of batteries do we choose to be?

If this essay has increased your anxiety about possibly being a battery, please remember that anxiety is just another form of electrical activity, and someone or something out there might be enjoying it immensely. You're welcome, cosmic overlords.

P.S. The fact that you can worry about being a battery that worries about being a battery suggests you might be a particularly sophisticated model. Premium features include recursive self-doubt and the ability to find humor in existential terror. Not every battery gets the consciousness upgrade.